UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

MARRIAGES THAT PROMOTE GROWTH

BY

NANCY CATHERINE HURST

©

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the process of developing a marriage in which individual and relationship growth occurs in couples married over ten years. Semi-structured audiotaped interviews were conducted with six couples who reported being in relationships which continue to grow and which foster their personal growth. A grounded theory methodology was employed and "Empowering Connections" emerged as the core theme. Empowering connections are characterized by a process of growth captured by the following categories: "Connecting Emotionally", "Loving Respectfully", "Expanding One's Self", and "Experiencing Empowering Connections". The results of the study provide insight for premarital couples, people who want to improve their marriage, and to therapists working with couples.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

> In the past, men and women came together to find security. Men and women needed each other primarily to survive. Today that is not enough; now we look to each other primarily for love, happiness and fulfillment.
>
> Couples can grow together in love over a lifetime but it takes education and practice. (Gray, 1996, p. 181)

This study is about personal and relationship growth in marriage. The fact that people are very interested in marriage and relationships is reflected by the topics of magazines, books and songs. Many popular magazines have regular columns about relationships and marriage including Psychology Today, New Woman, and Parents. If you look at a magazine stand you are surrounded by titles of articles about relationships. For example, "Passionate Love: How it starts, How it lasts" and "Great Guy, No Chemistry. Is there Hope?" were in recent 1998 issues of New Woman. The June 1988 issue of Psychology Today advertised an article entitled "When should you marry". "Should you leave?" "Marital conflicts remain the same, for better or for worse", "Love long distance", and "Wives have cause for complaint" were all articles in 1997 issues of Psychology Today.

Both academic and popular books on marriage abound. My own library is well populated by books on marriage including for example Bader and Pearson's In Quest of the Mythical Mate (1988). John Gray's famous Men are from Mars, Women

<u>are from Venus</u> (Grey, 1996) book "... has become one of the top selling self-help manuals of all time" (Stroff Marano, 1997; p. 29). Many of these books have become the focus of lengthy conversations with friends and my husband, Dwayne.

Song writers pose lyrics of both undying love and the painful feeling of failed relationships. My husband and I asked that guests at our wedding sing a song about love rather than the traditional clanking of glasses to inspire a kiss. Our family and friends had no difficulty coming up with songs of love including the Beatles classic "She loves you". When I went through my old 45's record collection I discovered that twenty-five of the forty records were about the ecstasy of love or the heartbreak of rejection.

The concept of growth and marriage is less advertised. Although I did find reference to it in a marriage card from my mother:

> May the promise that you make today bring
> happiness to you. And may your love keep growing
> every day your whole life through.

In this study the process of developing a marriage that promotes individual and relationship growth is explored. "Growth" means developing from a lower or simple form to a higher, more complex form. Twelve spouses were interviewed for this study answered affirmatively to the question "Are you in a relationship which continues to grow and which fosters your personal growth?".

This research has a different focus on marriage than research in which marital relationships based on level of

reported satisfaction with the marriage is studied. The word "satisfaction" reflects the level of gratification in the marriage but does not address growth of individuals or the couple. Other researchers have studied happy marriages. The word "happy" refers to pleasure or joy in the marriage. The concept of happiness, like satisfaction does not necessarily reflect growth within the marriage. While the concept of growth in marriage may include satisfaction and happiness what makes it unique is its focus on the progression over time from one particular form and function to a higher level of form and function. The purpose of this study is to uncover the processes involved in individual and relationship growth in marriage. The study will look at change over time of processes and components of marital relationships.

Expectations of marriage have increased over time and a focus on relationship and personal growth in marriage is a fairly recent phenomenon. Although there is a plethora of research on marriage, the topic of growth in marriage has been neglected. Understanding the process involved in creating a marriage that fosters individual as well as relationship growth can be uncovered through the grounded theory method.

History of Marriage

> ... before 1950's everybody knew men were from Mars and women were from Venus ... We were really in separate worlds. What's happening today is a huge transformation. It's the possibility of something greater than ever happened before for

> relationships. The only reason Romeo and Juliet's love is eternal is because they died. If they had married, their love would not have lasted. People didn't expect lasting passion from marriage (Grey, 1997; p. 68).

Prior to the twelfth century, in Western culture, the purpose of marriage was most often for economic, social and political benefits (Schnarch, 1997). To marry in order to satisfy romantic and intimacy needs of people is a relatively recent phenomenon. In North America, the emphasis on personal and relationship growth in marriage emerged in the 1960's.

Although love was not considered as a factor relevant to marriage, the concept of romantic love was evident in the Middle Ages (Schnarch, 1997). Schnarch (1997) states that some historians believe that romantic love was a response to Christianity's emphasis on chastity. Alternatively, romantic love has been related to upper class women who were bored and looking to escape chastity (Schnarch, 1997).

It was during the Middle Ages that the first story that addressed romantic love by William Shakespeare, "Tristan and Isolde", was introduced (Bader & Pearson, 1988), and it like many other stories to come, was characterized by tragedy:

> My lords, if you would hear a high tale of love and of death, here is that of Tristan and Queen Isolde; how to their full joy, but to their sorrow also, they loved each other, and how at last, they died of that love together upon one day; she by him and he by her (Shakespeare).

According to Schnarch (1997) attitudes about marriage were affected by the Industrial Revolution of the 1880's, which initiated a change in society from a community

orientation to a focus on individuals. Schnarch argues that this loss of community created existential loneliness, and people sought to fill the void within marital relationships. Further contributing to the changing expectations of marriage was Luther's Protestant Reformation that challenged celibacy and decrees against divorce. In addition, the invention of the printing press distributed information to the masses.

Beavers (1985) states that:

> History is filled with accounts of great love affairs, frequently between people who married, but they were of the ruling classes and never the peasantry. The industrial revolution and our own egalitarian revolution have raised the expectations of hundreds of millions of people concerning relationships, love, and marriage. Love is expected, and marriage must provide warmth and caring (p. 135).

Corresponding with different expectations of marriage were changes in role expectations and longer life span. Marriages moved from a patriarchal to a companionship model and spouses have had to developed new, more egalitarian, roles (Mace, 1987). In addition, the declining mortality rate meant that marriages lasted longer and a new developmental stage of marriages with grown children emerged. Simultaneously, people had higher expectations of marriage, a lack of clear guidelines for relationship functioning, and longer marriages.

A focus on growth as an important element of marriage arose around the 1960's with the development of marital enrichment programs (Stahmann & Salts, 1993). At the core

of marriage enrichment is a "positive growth-orientated, and dynamic view of marriage" (Hof & Miller, 1980, p. 4). Marriage enrichment promotes both relational and individual growth (Hof & Miller, 1980). The emergence of the belief that marriage can be an enriching experience left some spouses feeling dissatisfied when their expectations of marriage were not fulfilled:

> ... increasingly, individuals are seeking a relationship that will provide growth for them as individuals and as a couple ... as a result, many couples today are becoming increasingly frustrated because they have rejected the more traditional definition of a successful marriage, and yet are having difficulty achieving the type of mutually actualizing relationship that they are striving to achieve (Olson, 1972, p. 390).

Non-traditional expectations of marriage have corresponded with a flurry of research on marriage, which is briefly discussed in the following section.

Research Issues

Marriage researchers have neglected the topic of growth in marriage, and have focused on satisfactory or happy marriages. The majority of research studies have been quantitative in nature and have focused on limited relationships between variables; qualitative methodology offers an alternative approach.

Studies on marriage suggest that there are a number of benefits to being in a happy marriage. For example, couples in happy marriages report fewer physical and mental illnesses than those in unhappy marriages (Levenson, Carstensen, & Gottman, 1993). Veenhoven (1983) argues that

marriage is becoming increasingly indispensable as a support system as society continues to become more privatized and less community orientated. If Veenhoven's comment is valid this study of growth and marriage is timely.

Schnarch (1997) states "nowhere in the course of human civilization have people expected more gratification and fulfillment out of marriage than today" (p. 7). Current theories of marriage, however, are largely based on distressed couples and focus on satisfactory marriages rather than the growth potential of marriage (Crowe & Ridley, 1990; Lauer & Lauer, 1986). Although many of the theoretical concepts essential to these theories have implications for marriages that promote growth, the relationship has seldom been explicated. Existential/humanistic theorists, in contrast, relate theoretical concepts to growth in marriage (Hendrix, 1988; Kovacs, 1988; Mace, 1987).

There has been little research examining the process involved in individual and relationship growth within marriage. The one exception is the research conducted on marital enrichment programs, which are based on a philosophy of growth and have been found to improve marital relationships (Giblin, Sprenkle, & Sheehan, 1985; Zimpfer, 1988; Stahmann & Salts, 1993).

In contrast to the sparse research on growth and marriage, numerous studies have addressed a variety of variables relevent to satisfactory and unsatisfactory

marriages. Although this research is valuable and informative, it has been mostly quantitative in nature, and therefore limited by the parameters of this type of research. Many of the studies are correlational in nature and have focused on only a few variables at one time. The focus on isolated variables fails to capture the complex functioning of relationships. For example, communication has received a great deal of research attention, but has often been studied in isolation from other relationship factors like respect and commitment. Understanding the richness of human experience cannot be achieved by controlling all but a few variables.

Qualitative research offers an alternative to quantitative study. In contrast to quantitative research that seeks prediction and control qualitative researchers seek an understanding of people that deepens and enlarges the conceptualization of human relationships. Studies employing qualitative methodology are holistic and examine complex inter-relationships among many significant phenomena.

Qualitative research is especially appropriate for the study of marriage because it can be used to focus on interactions between people, and emotional dynamics, which are essential to marriage and difficult to study quantitatively. Despite this, qualitative research employing in depth interviews with married couples is lacking (Roberts, 1980; Sporakowski & Hughston, 1978). I

was unable to find any studies exploring the entire process of creating a marriage that fosters individual and relationship growth.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is an emerging trend in the study of marriage and family (Hardy & Keller, 1991) and is based on several underlying assumptions, which will be discussed. One type of qualitative research, is the grounded theory approach, which employs the constant comparison method of data analysis. The grounded theory approach is used in this study because it provides a valid form of data analysis that generates a process orientated conceptualization of the phenomena studied.

Qualitative research aims to capture the richness of human experience (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and is based on a number of underlying assumptions. Qualitative researchers believe that phenomena can only be studied holistically rather than dissected into independent variables. Individuals are viewed as unique, although there is a commonality of experience. They argue that researcher and participant are interconnected, the researcher is the key instrument, and research is value bound. Qualitative researchers believe that there is an essence of experience that can be captured by entering the world of others and people construct meanings through interaction with other (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). They do not focus on trying to measure a single tangible reality that can be discovered

through rigorous objectivity, and they view truth as relative.

According to Glaser and Strauss (1967) qualitative research was largely replaced by quantitative studies in the 1930's. After World War II, researchers made significant strides in quantitative methodology which became the methodology of choice. Further contributing to the decline in qualitative research was that, at the time, it was employed in nonrigorous and nonsystematic ways. The methods did not create research that could provide assurance of accurate evidence. Qualitative research was, therefore, relegated to preliminary, exploratory work and was viewed as inferior to quantitative research.

The grounded theory approach employing the constant comparative method addresses the need for systematic methodology in qualitative research. In contrast to other forms of qualitative research, grounded theory develops a theoretical formulation that goes beyond description. Glaser and Strauss's (1967) documentation of this method has enabled the qualitative researcher to conduct research according to a well defined methodology.

Grounded Theory Approach

"The grounded theory approach uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; p. 24). The grounded theory approach employs the constant comparative method of data analysis, and was used in this study. The

findings from this study are preliminary in nature; they are not meant to be viewed as a formal theory. The results do, however, offer a preliminary description of the processes involved in developing a marriage that fosters growth as interpreted through the analysis of transcripts from interviews of six couples.

The use of the term theory in this study does not refer to the traditional scientific theory that presents a set of laws. In this study, theory is more closely aligned to the concept of theories as linked sets of ideas, which express subjective experience (Fine & Turner, 1991). Theory development is valuable for a number of reasons including the following: (a) to predict and explain behavior; (b) for theoretical advance; (c) for practical application; (d) offers perspective on behavior; and (e) to provide a guide for research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Strauss and Corbin (1990) discuss two types of theory: substantive and formal theory. A formal theory involves studying phenomenon under many different types of situations. "Substantive theory evolves from the study of a phenomenon situated in one particular situational context" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; p. 174). Since growth in marriage has received little theoretical attention it is important to begin the process of developing a substantial theory of the process of creating a marriage that promotes growth.

Sampling in the grounded theory approach differs drastically from quantitative research, which aims for a

representative sample that can be generalized to a population. In contrast, in the grounded theory approach an attempt is made not to generalize, but to specify the conditions and consequences of the phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Incidents that are indicative of phenomena are sampled and the traditional counting of individuals is not applicable. The results of the study, therefore, apply to the situations or circumstances of the phenomenon studied not to others. Traditional criteria of generalizability, requiring large representative samples, derived from the quantitative paradigm do not apply to the grounded theory approach. The more interviews, however, the wider the applicability of the theory.

In the current study, grounded theory methodology is employed to generate an initial guide to understanding of the process involved in creating a marriage that fosters growth. This study is guided by the following question: How have couples been able to create a marriage in which individual and relationship growth occur?

Format of Manuscript

This document is divided into five chapters. Chapter one contains the introduction. In Chapter two literature about theoretical constructs of marriage, factors relevant to marriage functioning, and Marriage Enrichment are presented. The third Chapter contains a description of the methodology employed in this study and describes the participants. The results of this study are presented in

Chapter four and discussed in Chapter five.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

There is an abundance of literature on marriage covering a large spectrum of topics. Although the topic of growth in marriage has received scant attention, much of the literature on marriage has implications to marriages in which growth occurs. I have grouped these areas into three headings: "theoretical constructs", "factors related to marital functioning" and "Marriage Enrichment".

Theoretical Constructs

Theories developed from clinical work with couples and families are used to emphasize a number of concepts relevent to marital functioning. Many of these theories are clinically orientated, aimed at understanding marriage, and lead to a particular orientation in marital therapy. Although they may not use the word growth they aim towards improving marital functioning, which infers growth. Many theoretical constructs essential to marriage and family theories, therefore, have unstated implications to growth in marriage. These concepts are reviewed and their implications towards growth discussed. Theoretical concepts with implications about how marriages grow include the following: behavioral contingencies, circular causality and homeostasis, boundaries, differentiation, attachment, and transference/projection.

Behavioral Contingencies

The behavioral model applies principles of human

learning theory to maladaptive, problematic behavior of spouses. A central component from this perspective is behavioral contingencies which refers to the increase or decrease in behavior in response to the presentation of positive or negative stimuli. Behavioral marital theorists refer to these stimuli as rewards and costs (Crowe & Ridley, 1990). Rewards involve the gratifying aspects of marriages such as affection and companionship. Costs include the disagreeable aspects of marriage, like unmet needs. The early stages of relationships are characterized by high levels of rewards and low levels of costs. In behavioral marital therapy, spouses identify behaviors that are rewarding and punishing, and they are directed to increase or decrease these behaviors, respectively.

Christensen, Jacobson, and Babcock (1995) have integrated the concept of acceptance into traditional behavioral therapy. In Christensen et al.'s Integrative Behavioral Couple Therapy (IBCT), strategies for assisting the development of acceptance between spouses are implemented. According to this model acceptance occurs when spouses view previously offensive, unacceptable and blameworthy behavior in a new way. Previously negative behaviors are viewed as understandable, tolerable or even valuable and appreciated. In other words, negative behaviors are transformed into neutral or rewarding ones. This occurs, for example, when an attribute such as frugality is transformed from an annoyance into a strength.

According to behavioral marital theorists, marriages are satisfactory if rewards are greater than the costs. From this perspective marital therapy would end when spouses are satisfied with the balance of rewards and costs. This balance could, however, potentially leave couples at a marginal level of satisfaction. Behavioral theorists do not discuss the potential for continuous relationship growth that behavioral contingencies suggest. Theoretically the rewarding aspects of marriages could continue to grow while costs decrease creating a very positive marital experience.

Christensen et al. (1995) argue the research on behavioral therapy indicates that many couples do not show lasting benefits from treatment. One third of the couples do not show any benefit and about one third of the couples who show immediate benefit from therapy experience a relapse within one to two years. Overall, therefore, only about half of the couples treated with behavioral marital therapy improve and maintain the benefits of treatment.

Circular Causality and Homeostasis

The concept of circularity is basic to systems theory and means that systems are constantly modified by recursive circular feedback (Guttman, 1991). In marital therapy, circular causality refers to the belief that in relationships things happen not because of one person's mental illness or destructive behavior, but as a result of a complex cycle of interaction. According to the concept of homeostasis the couple system functions in a way that

maintains the status quo. Therapists with a systemic orientation, therefore, aim to disrupt the dysfunctional status quo by seeking change in the interaction between spouses. Based on the concept of circular causality it can be hypothesized that when modifications to the system, which break the systems homeostasis, involve positive behaviors that recursively feedback on each other a positive cycle of interaction occurs. Since circular patterns have no end (Segal, 1991), it can be further hypothesized that this positive cycle can be perpetually leading to constant growth.

Boundaries

Boundaries are an important relational construct and receive particular emphasis in structural family therapy (Minuchin & Fishman, 1981). Boundaries refer to the rules governing family members in interaction with each other. According to Minuchin and Fishman (1981), it is crucial that spouses develop boundaries that allow them to meet their needs without the intrusion of in-laws and children. The intergenerational boundary can be too rigid (where the children have no say in the family decision), or too weak (where they are asked to be more-or-less parent substitutes). Boundaries are crossed when parents share confidential couple information with a child or a parent. Successful marriages have appropriate boundaries in which spouses share intimate information with each other. Minuchin and Fishman suggest that marriages can improve by

developing appropriate boundaries, which are necessary for healthy marital functioning. Based on their theory it can be hypothesized that appropriate boundaries would foster a relationship that enhances spouses' ability to be intimately connected with each other, thereby facilitating relationship growth.

Distance Regulation

The concept of distance regulation is especially relevant to couple therapy. Distance regulation refers to the way spouses create emotional distance and closeness. According to systems theory, behavior that increases distance is employed to avoid the discomfort of too much intimacy. Distance is created when, for example, a spouse turns on the television while his or her partner begins to talk about their relationship. The struggle with developing a comfortable amount of closeness and distance reflects the dialectic of dependance/ independence. Spouses must struggle with how close they can be without becoming completely dependent and losing their individuality. At the opposite end of the spectrum are spouses who become so independent and separate that there is little emotional closeness.

Olson, Russell and Sprenkle's (1989) Circumplex Model of family functioning is based on the premise that couples in healthy families develop a balance between independence and connection by incorporating both different and shared activities into their lives. Research has supported the

propositions of the Circumplex Model. Studies have found that balanced families report less symptomology (Clarke (1984); Olson & Killorin (1984); Carnes (1987); Rodick, Henggeler & Hanson (1986).

Kovacs (1988) argues that developmental theories of marriage (Bader & Pearson, 1983; Rock, 1986) have used the concept of closeness-distance as the basis for examining and describing the stages of marriage. The implication towards growth in marriage is explicitly stated by Kovacs (1988):

> the crux of marital growth and development is the struggle to achieve some balance between the strivings for dependence-independence and closeness-distance and, ultimately, the achievement of mutuality, sharing, and intimacy. The dilemma in the marital process is how to balance the striving for separateness of being an individual, and still live in harmony with another human being (p. 141).

According to Kovacs (1988) couples go through stages, that involve tasks that need to be mastered. The individual's ability to promote growth is based on environmental and cultural imperatives, personality, personal aspiration, and values. He summarizes the stages of growth presented by developmental theorists (Bader & Pearson, 1983; Rock, 1986) as follows:

Stage I.

Stage I is characterized by a highly romanticized, idealized, and exclusive relationship. Couples merge and establish a boundary around each other. Differences are minimized and similarities accentuated. The major task for this stage involves building a foundation for a mutually

gratifying, caring, and supportive relationship that is separate from the family of origin. According to Bader and Pearson (1983), if each person receives optimal nurturance they will be able to move beyond this stage easily. The transition to the next stage begins when one partner moves toward differentiation. Difficulties emerge when couples remain enmeshed and continue to see themselves as "one", cling to each other, have severe abandonment and engulfment issues, and are terrified to find out that they are different from each other (Kovacs, 1988).

Stage II.

In stage two the reality of differences can no longer be denied and the couple must struggle to maintain harmony. The tasks during this stage involve accepting that each must meet one's own needs, and require time apart. Reconciling different styles and expectations of each other, and dealing with conflict while maintaining closeness are major tasks to be dealt with during this stage. Transition to the third stage occurs when couples are able to recognize and affirm their "differentness".

Stage III.

During stage three couples struggle for more independence. Power struggles ensue when compromise is equated with surrendering one's identity and control. Tasks during this stage involve expanding the boundaries of the relationship, reconciling the positive and negative traits of each partner, and developing empathy. Transitions to the

next stage begin when partners relinquish power struggles for cooperation and intimacy.

Stage IV.

During these middle years of marriage there seems to be a pressure to resolve unfinished business of the past and to reconcile relationships with parents. It is also during this stage that spouses often start searching for another relationship, and may talk about separating. The focus shifts to one's self and one's own needs. Tasks include achieving separateness/independence, improving negotiation skills, and choosing the relationship as a way of life. Transition occurs when a sense of constancy is reached.

Stage V.

In stage five couples begin to view each other's strivings for independence as normal and acceptable. Each accepts the other's strengths and weaknesses, and takes responsibility for his or her own needs. Tasks during this stage include developing a clear sense of self, taking responsibility for one's own thoughts and behavior, sharing responsibility, and accepting interdependence. This stage is a time of resolution when they experience warmth, love, and intimacy.

Stage VI.

According to Rock (1986) it is in this stage that people become the creators of their own universe. Partners fully accept their spouses, which creates a new sense of freedom. Partners are free to explore new ways of

fulfilling themselves instead of pouring energy into the marriage. Tasks for this stage include accepting help from others, finding alternative sources of affection, learning to live on a retirement income, and preparing for death by building a set of beliefs that one can live and die with.

From the developmental perspective, marriage is not static but constantly changing and growth is essential.

Differentiation

According to multigenerational theorists individuals in relationships need to separate from their families of origin in order to freely connect to their spouses (Bowen, 1978; Framo, 1981; Paul & Paul, 1975).

Bowen (1978) discusses separation from the family of origin in terms of differentiation of self, which involves the ability to discriminate intellectual from emotional functioning. He states that a lack of differentiation results in marital and family dysfunction. A highly differentiated person is able to be in emotional contact with others while maintaining autonomous emotional functioning. According to Bowen (1978), differentiation of self is necessary for successful marital functioning. Differentiation is potentially a life long process suggesting that marital growth is a continuous process.

Research on differentiation of self has found that higher levels of differentiation are related to higher levels of marital functioning (Kvanli & Jennings, 1987; Kear, 1978; Richards, 1989). Kear (1978) and Richards

(1989) found that people with higher levels of differentiation reported healthier family and marital functioning as measured by the Family Adaptability scale, Cohesion Evaluation Scales (FACES III) and the Marital Adjustment Test.

Attachment

According to Bowlby (1973) marital relationships reflect the "working models" spouses developed as children. "Working models" are based on continued interaction with caregivers and these models contain beliefs and expectations about whether a child's caretaker is caring and responsive. Secure attachments allow children to risk exploring their environment because they feel confident that their parents will be available when needed. These models are carried into adult relationships where they guide expectations, perceptions, and behavior (Bowlby, 1973). Bowlby's theory postulates that people who developed secure attachments with their parents are more likely to develop similar secure attachments with their spouses.

Although Bowlby does not address growth in marriage, attachment styles have implications for growth. Based on attachment theory, it can be hypothesized that a marriage with securely attached spouses would provide a secure foundation similar to that of a child securely attached to a parent. Spouses who are securely attached, therefore, can be expected to be more comfortable with exploring and growing through experiences outside of the relationship.

Research has supported Bowlby's theory (1973). Collin and Read (1990), and Hazan and Shaver (1987) examined the relationships between parent-child attachment and adult love. These researchers found that the respondents' perceptions of the quality of the relationships they had with their parents corresponded with their current adult relationships. An association between attachment styles and romantic relationships has been found (Levy & Davis, 1988; Hendrick & Hendrick, 1989; Feeney & Noller, 1990). Securely attached persons reported positive relationship characteristics. People classified as having avoidant attachments were found to have relationships characterized by mistrust and fear, and anxiously attached adults had dependent and needy relationships. The majority of the research on the relationship between parents and spouses, however, has been conducted on engaged or recently married couples limiting the generalizability of the findings. Studies have been largely retrospective in nature, and thus susceptible to memory distortions.

Transference and Projection

A central concept of object relations and psychoanalytical marital theory is the belief that it is the inner world of each spouse that is central to marital functioning (Crowe & Ridley, 1990). Each partner is perceived as having an unconscious internal blueprint of relationship expectations, which is largely based on childhood experience. This unconscious blueprint is

projected onto one's spouse. Spouses' interactions are highly influenced by this unconscious blueprint, which is referred to as transference. In psychoanalytical therapy, transference interpretations are made and interaction between spouses are commented on. When major difficulties arise the therapist helps each partner recall events, situations or experiences with parents, which had a similar impact upon them as the current relationship with the spouse (Crowe & Ridley, 1990). While object relations and psychoanalytic theorists focus on the resolution of transference to achieve marital satisfaction, they fail to emphasize the possibilities for growth created by the working through of transference in marriage.

In contrast to psychoanalytic and object relations theorists, Hendrix's (1988) theory focuses on the opportunities for growth derived from the working through of transference and projection. Hendrix believes that if people can work through transference distortions they can develop an intimate enriching marriage. He argues that the success of marriage depends not on finding the perfect mate, but on a willingness for self growth. He views much of the necessary growth being related to healing childhood wounds by working through transference. Hendrix states that all children experience childhood wounds in various ways because no parent can respond to all the needs of a child. He states that people develop an internal unconscious image or Imago, that consists of the positive and negative traits of

caretakers.

Hendrix argues that throughout the process of growing up, children are given messages that certain behaviors and feelings are unacceptable. Through socialization some feelings, for example, happiness, may be encouraged, while other feelings, perhaps anger, are discouraged. Children learn that certain behaviors and thoughts are unacceptable and begin to repress some aspects of themselves (the lost self). The lost self is projected onto one's spouse.

The imago, therefore, consists of the positive and negative traits of parents and aspects of the lost self. According to Hendrix (1988), people search for a spouse with the hope of recreating the conditions of childhood in order to heal childhood wounds. The closer the partner is to one's imago, the more intense the relationship. If individuals begin to acknowledge and take responsibility for their childhood wounds, express their needs to their spouse, and spouses listen intensely they can creating a very rewarding marriage.

Snyder and Wills (1989) compared insight-orientated therapy (psychodynamic) and behavioral therapy to a wait-list control. They found that both approaches produced significant improvements in marital satisfaction. In a four year follow-up of Snyder and Wills' study, however, the results were very different (Snyder, Wills, & Grady-Fletcher, 1991). They found a much higher rate of deterioration for couples who had engaged in behavioral

rather the insight-orientated therapy. In fact 38 percent of those in the behaviorally orientated therapy were divorced compared to three percent in the insight orientated group.

Theoretical concepts based on clinical theories have implications towards growth and marriage. Based on these concepts it can be surmised that the following characteristics would be important to marriages that continue to grow: high levels of rewards and low costs, a positive cycle of interaction, healthy boundaries, balance between closeness and distance, high levels of differentiation, and issues of transference resolved.

There has been little research exploring the relationship between growth and marriage. There has, however, been a substantial amount of research conducted on factors believed to be related to marital functioning.

Factors Related to Marital Functioning

Much of the research on marriage has explored the association between marital satisfaction and variables believed to be associated with marital success. Since growth involves developing into a higher form, marriages in which growth occurs, can be expected to be experienced as, at the least, satisfactory. Satisfactory marriages and marriages characterized by growth may, therefore, have common characteristics. Marital satisfaction research has studied the following areas: length of marriage, similarities, spirituality, interaction, power, sexuality,

intimacy, humor, commitment, communication, gender issues. Research on long-term marriages and happily married couples highlight factors related to marital functioning.

Length of Marriage

Studies relating marital satisfaction to length of marriage have reported inconsistent results. In some studies, marital satisfaction has been found to decline with length of marriage (Glass & Wright, 1977; Yelsma, 1986), and show a U shape, with a significant decline in satisfaction during child raising years in other studies (Lupri & Frideres, 1981). Glenn (1989), in his study of 1500 respondents chosen through a probability sampling method in the United States, found that the dip in marital satisfaction was largely due to a duration of marriage effect, rather than the presence of children. Finkel and Hansen (1992), however, found that the lower ratings of marital happiness were related to how many children couples had and the associated child-rearing problems. They also found that the more problems couples currently reported, the more highly they rated their early marital years, suggesting that recollections of happiness were influenced by current experiences. Finkel and Hansen's study focused on a small, homogeneous sample limiting generalizability.

Similarity

Research has found that the more similar a person is to his or her spouse in terms of personality, socioeconomic class, and ethnicity, the higher their marital satisfaction

and marital adjustment (Kear, 1978; Kvanli & Jennings, 1987; Mascie-Taylor & Vandenberg, 1988; Phillips, Fulker, Carey & Nagoshi, 1988; Richards, 1989; White & Hatcher, 1984). White and Hatcher (1984) caution, however, that the majority of the similarity research has employed insufficient controls and has been conducted using correlational methodology, which may artificially inflate similarity.

Deal, Wampler and Halverson (1992) also discuss the difficulties with correlational methods of measuring similarity, and argue that interclass correlations are a more appropriate measurement. In their study they found that individuals who were satisfied with their marital relationship felt their spouses viewed them with high regard, had open communication and were more likely to have similar perceptions to their spouses of what family and marriage are like. They argue that similarity of perceptions is a characteristic of well-functioning, satisfied relationships.

Spirituality

Prest and Keller (1993) argue that there is a lack of professional literature addressing spirituality in the field of marital and family therapy. They state further that "because the vast majority of families adopt some form of expression of their spirituality (Campbell & Moyers, 1988) it seems logical that therapists should attend to the spiritual belief systems of their clients if they are to better understand the people with whom they work" (p. 127).

Studies have found religiosity to be associated with higher marital satisfaction (Hunt & King, 1978), but it is also associated with staying in unhappy marriages (Bugaighis, Schumm, Jurich & Bollman, 1985/86; Lauder & Lauder, 1986). Heaton and Pratt (1990) state that a variety of explanations have been offered for the association between religiosity and marital satisfaction including value consensus, and integrated social networks of relatives, friends and religious advisors.

Roth (1988) studied spiritual and religious well-being in married couples. Spiritual well-being was defined as a an internal religious and existential orientation that has been well integrated into persons and their way of being in the world, whereas religious well-being referred to involvement with religion at a cognitive level. One hundred and forty-seven married couples, who were recruited for the study from three churches in California, completed the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Scale (Locke & Wallace, 1959) and the Spiritual Well Being Scale (Paloutizian & Ellison, 1982). Roth (1988) found a significant relationship between spiritual well-being and marital adjustment for both husbands and wives. The highest correlations were for wives married 10-19 years and husbands married 20-29 years. Religious well-being had lower correlations with marital adjustment and the author suggests that a cognitive, religious belief is not enough, but that it needs to be an integral part of a person to have positive

effects on marriage. The fact that all of these couples were involved members of a church limits the generalizability of the findings.

Hatch, James and Schumm (1986) examined the relationship between spiritual intimacy and marital satisfaction. Couples answered questions believed to reflect spiritual intimacy (example, "I feel close to my spouse when we're in worship") and emotional intimacy ("My spouse can really understand my hurts and joys"). Hatch et al. (1986) state that the results suggest that spiritual intimacy operates indirectly through emotional intimacy.

Interaction

Couples in happy marriages have been found to spend more time talking, discussing personal topics, and less time in conflict than couples in unhappy marriages (Kirchler, 1989). Shared time together has been found to be associated with lower divorce rates (Booth, Johnson, White & Edwards, 1985; Hill, 1988). Smith, Snyder, Trull, and Monsma (1988) found that engagement in individual pursuits with others, to the exclusion of one's spouse, are particularly predictive of global marital distress. The most consistent predictor of satisfaction was the proportion of leisure activity shared with the spouse. Kirchler (1989), using a diary approach, studied 6 married couples and 15 couples who were living together. He found that happy spouses joined each other more frequently in everyday settings, were more frequently together at home, reported

equal balances of power, were better able to perceive their partner's needs, and husbands were in a better mood when their wives were present than moderately happy couples. The generalizability of Kirchler's (1989) findings are limited because of the small sample size employed. According to social learning theory it would be assumed that being together is more rewarding to happy couples (Berscheid, 1983), which is supported in White's (1983) study. In his study of 2034 married people over age 55, White found a feedback loop of frequency of interaction between spouses. The more frequently the spouses interacted, the happier they were with their relationship, and the more time they spent together. Reissman, Aron and Bergen (1993) in their study of fifty-three well-adjusted, middle class couples, randomly assigned couples to one of the following groups: (a) control group; (b) spend more time together; and (c) engage in more exciting activities together. They found that spending time together of any kind did not increase relationship satisfaction, but that those who participated in exciting activities showed a greater increase in satisfaction than those assigned to pleasant activities. The authors interpreted the finding as supporting Aron and Aron's (1986) theory of self-expansion, which argues that people have a primary motivation to expand themselves. They propose that one source of expansion is through relationships and that once a relationship has been included into the sense of self, expansion stagnates creating boredom.

Sexuality

Stable marriages, in which partners consider themselves happy and satisfied, are more likely to report high rates of sexual activity than relationships characterized by friction (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Doddridge, 1987; Greenblat, 1983). Donnelly (1993) surveyed 6,029 married people who were representative of the population of the United States. He found that marriages in which partners reported high levels of mutually satisfying interaction were happy in their marriages, shared activities, and did not plan to separate, and were more likely to be sexually active. Sexual activity decreased with increasing age, and the longer respondents were married the more likely they were to be in sexually inactive marriages. Donnelly (1993) concludes that "although sexually inactive marriages are not uncommon, they are not happy, stable marriages in which the partners simply do not have sex. In fact, lack of sexual activity appears to be associated with the existence of other problems in the relationship and may indicate serious marital difficulty" (p. 177). However, there were some difficulties with the wording of questions in the survey. The question "how often did you have sex, within the last month?" is open to interpretation, and it is questionable whether reports of sex in the past month are typical for the relationship.

Intimacy

Intimacy and self-disclosure have been found to be

predictors of marital satisfaction (Hansen & Schuldt, 1984; Hendrick, 1981). Waring, Tillman, Frelick, Russell and Weisz (1980) conducted unstructured interviews with a non clinical population. Participants reported that sharing private thoughts, dreams, attitudes, and beliefs were an important determinant of intimacy. Although letting off steam was viewed as important to relationships, they found that expressed anger, resentment and criticism resulted in interpersonal distance. Knowing oneself, one's needs and having a sense of self-esteem were reported to be associated with intimacy. The fact that only half of those contacted agreed to participate in the study raises the possibility that the sample used in this study may have been more highly motivated and nondefensive than the population at large. Hansen and Schuldt (1984), in their study of 50 married couples, found that on self-report measures husbands' and wives' disclosures to each other were predictive of marital satisfaction. Behavioral measures (coding of intimacy by raters), however, did not reveal any relationship between self-disclosure and marital satisfaction. The laboratory setting in which these couples were observed may have affected the levels of intimacy observed.

Self-disclosure, however, makes up only a small portion of communication between couples. In fact, the majority of talking involves mundane exchanges about comings and goings (Wood, 1993). This communication, however, keeps partners tuned into each other (Wood, 1995)

Humor

Ziv and Gadish (1989) state that the role of humor in marital satisfaction has been ignored. Ziv and Gadish (1989) studied fifty couples who had been married an average of 7.1 years. Humor was found to be significantly related to marital satisfaction for husbands, but not wives. Humor has also been found to be a factor related to marital satisfaction in studies of long-term marriages (Bradbury, 1991; Lauer & Lauer; 1986; Roberts, 1980)

Commitment

Couples in long-term marriages report that commitment has played a central role (Malatesta, 1989; Stahmann & Salts, 1993). Swensen and Trahaug (1985) studied commitment in long-term marriages using a sample of 72 subjects with an average age of 66.7 years and married an average of 37.3 years. They distinguished between couples committed to the institution of marriage in comparison to those who are committed to their partner as a unique person. The results indicated that those with a commitment to their partner as a person had significantly fewer marital problems than those committed to the institution of marriage. Those who indicated that their commitment to their partner as a person had increased over time had fewer marital problems. Commitment to the spouse as a person declined, however, for most of the couples studied.

Sabatelli and Cecil-Pigo (1985) studied the relationship between interdependence and commitment in

marriage. Interdependence involves perceiving outcomes from the relationship as being equally distributed, which serves as a barrier to the dissolution of the relationship. They found that those who perceive the outcomes in their marriages as equitably distributed evaluated their marriages as more favorable and reported higher levels of commitment.

Fehr (1988) studied the components of commitment. Central features of commitment were found to be loyalty, responsibility, living up to one's word, and faithfulness. The central features of commitment increased as the level of commitment increased in the relationship.

Love

A number of researchers have studied the relationship between love and marriage. Hendrick, Hendrick and Adler (1988) examined the relationship between marital satisfaction and three variables: love attitudes, self-disclosure and commitment. Their research used Lee's (1973) typology of love which includes the intense love of Eros; the game-playing uncommitted love of Ludus; the friendship-based love of Storge; the practical love of Pragma; the obsessive, dependent love of Mania; and the altruistic love of Agape. They found that passionate love, self-disclosure, self-esteem, commitment, and the absence of game-playing and manipulative sexuality were related to higher levels of marital satisfaction. In comparison to couples who separated, those who remained together were more erotic, less ludic, more disclosing, higher in self-esteem,

commitment and relationship satisfaction. Limited generalizations can be made because the couples were young, middle class, university students in fairly short-term relationships.

Fehr (1988) conducted a number of studies investigating the central components of love and commitment. Couples rated the centrality of features in love, and the following emerged as being most central; trust, caring, honesty, friendship, respect, concern for the other's well-being, loyalty, commitment, accepting the other the way she/he is, and supportiveness. Passionate erotic love features (physical attraction, touching) were rated as more peripheral. The central features of love and commitment increased systematically as the relationships became more loving or more committed; peripheral features did not exhibit this pattern. Fehr (1988) also found that a violation of central features was seen to seriously threaten the extent to which a relationship was viewed as loving. She found that some, but not all, features of love and commitment are shared, indicating that they are related but not synonymous. Interpretations of Fehr's findings should be made cautiously because of the sample used. Subjects were undergraduate psychology students, and their relationship history was not recorded, limiting the generalizability of the findings.

Aron and Henkemeyer (1995) studied the relationship between passionate love, defined as an intense longing for

union, and marital satisfaction. They found that passionate love was related to marital satisfaction for women, but not men. The sample consisted of married couples in a liberal, university orientated community.

Communication

Communication has been found to be a key factor in marital satisfaction (Jacobson & Moore, 1991; Schaap, Buunk, & Kerkstra, 1988). Kieren and Doherty-Poirier (1993) argue that the success of families is dependent on communication, and that it is through communication that "family members are enabled to develop rapport, understanding, and trust: to coordinate actions; to problem solve and resolve conflicts; and to transmit affection, joy, or distress" (p. 155). The importance of communication may be related to feeling understood and the ability to empathize. Allen and Thompson (1984) found that feelings of being understood were associated with communicative satisfaction. Noller (1982) found that spouses high in marital adjustment are significantly better able to put themselves in the place of their partners, and are more sensitive to their partners' feelings than those in less well adjusted marriages.

Communication Theories

Communication is viewed as central to healthy marital functioning from numerous theoretical orientations. Systems theorists like Olson, Russell and Sprenkle (1989) highlight the role of communication. They argue that empathy, reflective listening, and supportive comments enable couples

and families to share with each other, whereas communication characterized by double messages, double binds and criticism impede the ability to share. For behaviorists communication is a mode through which behavioral contingencies can be altered. When spouses communicate clearly they can negotiate an equitable amount of rewards and costs (Crowe & Ridley, 1990).

Satir's Communication Model of family therapy focuses on communication between family members and spouses. Satir, Stachowiak, and Taschman (1975) highlight the importance of open, direct communication. They outline several types of dysfunctional communication: blaming, placating, super-reasonable and irrelevant (Satir, Stachowiak, & Taschman, 1975). The placater always agrees, apologizes and tries to please. The blamer dominates, finds fault, and accuses. A super-reasonable person remains detached, calm, cool, not emotionally involved, and the irrelevant person distracts others and seems unable to relate to anything. In contrast to dysfunctional styles of communicating, the congruent communicator seems real, genuinely expressive, and clear. Satir et al. (1975) state that dysfunctional communication styles are maintained to keep people from exposing their true feelings because they lack the self-esteem that would allow them to be themselves. They argue that intimacy developed through open communication is the vehicle for growth among family members. From this perspective, clear communication

facilitates personal and relationship growth.

Emotional Expressiveness

King (1993) examined emotional expressiveness with fifty married couples, who completed questionnaires measuring emotional expressiveness, ambivalence over emotional expression, their spouses' expressiveness and marital satisfaction. King found that the tendency to be emotionally expressive is positively associated with marital satisfaction, especially for men. Husbands' ambivalence over emotional expression was negatively related to couples marital satisfaction. The findings are correlational in nature and cannot address why some couples are able to develop emotionally expressive marriages and others were not.

Teaching Communication Skills

Therapeutic outcome studies indicate that teaching communication skills can enhance marital adjustment (James, 1991; Markman, Renick, Floyd, Stanley & Clements, 1993). Hahlweg and Markman (1988) used meta-analysis to determine the effectiveness of behavioral marital therapy (BMT) and behavioral premarital intervention (BPI) programs which focus on communication skill training, problem solving and cognitive restructuring. They found that BMT is more effective than no treatment in reducing marital distress for at least a 3 to 12 month period. The average improvement attributable to BMT was found to be about 40%. BPI was found to be more effective than no treatment in improving

couples relationships and preventing subsequent problems.

Barnes, Schumm, Jurich and Bollman (1984) argue that the role of communication, as a variable mediating the success of relationships, may be overemphasized. In their survey of 83 rural and 98 urban couples, they found that communication and positive regard (positive feelings, and admiration of the other person), are both related to marital satisfaction. When they partialed out the communication variable from the regard/marital satisfaction relationship, however, the shared variance was reduced by less than half. When they partialed out regard from the communication/ marital satisfaction variable it was reduced by more than half, suggesting that positive regard largely mediates the relationship between communication and marital satisfaction. Barnes et al. (1984), argue further that communication training that does not address relationship issues may be of little benefit, and could be destructive.

Premarital Courses

Premarital programs help couples work out difficulties prior to marriage, and teach behavioral techniques (Stahmann & Salts, 1993). Stahmann and Salts outline the content and goals of marriage preparation programs as follows:

1. To strengthen the communication skills of the couple (enhance verbal and nonverbal communication, increase ability to discuss personal topics, and discuss events of the day).
2. Develop friendships and commitment to the relationship

(take time together for talking, have fun together).
3. Develop couple intimacy (share feelings, share personal experiences, and become psychologically close).
4. Develop problem-solving skills and apply them to the areas of marital role, finances, and affective behavior.
5. Focus on developing positive, rather than negative communication.

Studies have found that premarital courses are effective in improving marital satisfaction (Bader, Microys, Sinclair & Willet, 1980; Markman, Renick, Floyd, Stanley & Clements, 1993; Parish, 1990). Nickols, Fournier and Nickols (1986), in their review of the factors associated with the success or failure of premarital programs, conclude that relationship skill development activities were more effective than lecture. Parish (1990) found that a Premarital Assessment Program (PAP), when combined with communication skills training, resulted in couples making significant gains in dyadic adjustment and commitment to the relationship.

Markman et al. (1993) taught communication and conflict resolution skills to couples planning marriage. After a four year follow-up couples continued to show greater use of communication skills, and more support and validation than did control couples. They also showed less withdrawal, less conflict, and less overall negative communication than did control couples. Five years later, however, the benefits were not significant except for communication skill usage by

men, and less negative escalation of conflict. Couples who received the premarital training were less likely to break up before marriage than the control group, suggesting that perhaps the couple had gained a confidence that they would be able to handle problems in their relationship.

Conflict Processes

John Gottman (1994) offers a model of marital functioning based on his many years of observing couples sort out disagreements. He discusses destructive and constructive communication styles. Gottman states that "a lasting marriage results from a couple's ability to resolve the conflicts that are inevitable in any relationship" (p. 28). He states that in happy marriages there are at least five times as many positive as negative moments together. Positivity can be shown by showing interest, being affectionate, showing that you care, being appreciative, showing concern, being empathetic, showing acceptance, joking, and sharing joy.

Gottman (1994) found three categories of problem solving in healthy marriages. In the validating marriage couples compromise often and calmly work through their problems. These couples have a mutual respect, which leads them to choose arguments carefully and to communicate a respect for each others' opinions in the middle of an argument. In these relationships the "we-ness" of the relationship is emphasized over individual goals. Volatile couples engage in conflict often and have passionate

disputes. They are independent and honestly express their inner most thoughts, but are able to resolve conflicts. In a conflict-avoiding marriage they agree to disagree, rarely confronting their differences head on. Couples in these marriages have a low level of companionship and sharing, and although continue to feel happy they do not experience the passion of volatile or validating couples. His research found that a key characteristic of long-term married couples are love and respect, which is displayed in affection, showing genuine interest in each other, and expressions of empathy and sympathy.

Gottman (1994) outlines four different ways of interacting which sabotage successful resolution of conflict. The first is **Criticism**, which involves attacking one person's personality rather than a specific behavior. Criticism becomes **contempt** when the intention is to insult and hurt, and is fuelled by negative thoughts about the partner. When people are criticized and treated contemptuously they tend to act with **defensiveness** and defend against the attack. **Stonewalling** occurs when people stop responding and withdraw from their partner. Marriages plagued with criticism, contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling develop a continual cycle of discord and negativity.

Observation of couples in a laboratory setting has found that negative emotional behavior such as expressed anger, sadness, criticisms, hostility and contempt appear to

be the best discriminators between satisfied and dissatisfied marriages (Bradbury (1991); Gottman & Kroff, 1990; Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1990; Notarius, Benson & Sloane, 1989). The relationship between negative emotional affect and marital satisfaction, however, is complicated. Negativity has been found to be associated with short-term marital dissatisfaction, but long-term satisfaction (Gottman & Krokoff, 1990; Krokoff, 1991).

Like Gottman (1994), Markman (1991) argues that successful resolution of conflict is the key to marital success, and that couples need to be taught how to handle negative affect. He states that when couples deal with conflict, their attempts stir up issues producing dissatisfaction. In the long run, however, if couples sort through conflict they will develop more satisfying relationships. The relationship between resolution of conflict and marital satisfaction is supported by Sayers, Baucom, Sher, Weiss and Heymans' (1991) study that found that when wives' negative behaviors led to husbands' engagement in problem solving behaviors, wives marital satisfaction increased. Husbands reported greater marital satisfaction when they did not withdraw in response to wives' nonconstructive behavior. Haefner, Notarius and Pellegrini (1991) found that wives in satisfied marriages had lower levels of satisfaction with a discussion when their husbands engaged in behaviors that inhibited problem-solving. The authors hypothesized that this dissatisfaction

motivated wives to re-engage their husbands in conflict and resolve the problem. Other researchers, however, have found negative behavior and disengagement to be associated with lower levels of satisfaction 12 to 30 months later (Bradbury, 1991; Smith, Vivian, & O'Leary, 1990). Bradbury and Karney (1993), argue that there may be intervening factors that need to be distinguished from negativity, that may account for the discrepancy in the findings. Bradbury et al. (1993) in their review of the literature report that behaviors reflecting resignation, disengagement and sadness are consistently associated with long-term dissatisfaction longitudinally, and unrelated to concurrent satisfaction.

Gottman (1994) in studying marital conflict found that increased physiological arousal, especially of husbands, predicted marital dissatisfaction three years later. Couples who were physiologically calmer had marriages that improved over time. Wives who were more agreeable and compliant, and husbands who showed a pattern of withdrawal (stonewalling) had marriages that deteriorated. Deterioration of marital satisfaction, however, did not predict marital separation or divorce because many unhappy couples stayed together. Four years later, however, lower levels of marital satisfaction were predicted by facial expressions of the following: wives' disgust, husbands' fear, husbands' miserable smile and wives' miserable smile. In addition, husbands and wives who were observed to be more defensive, wives who complained more, and, husbands who

disagreed more, had higher rates of marital separation (Carstensen, Levenson & Gottman, 1995).

Gottman (1994) describes the behavior in stages. In the first stage marital conflict begins with the husband becoming physiologically aroused, he stonewalls his wife, emotionally withdraws from the conflict, and avoids future conflict. The husband's behavior is upsetting for the wife, which leads to her physiological arousal, and she tries to engage her husband. She withdraws from him, criticizes, and both become defensive. People can be so overwhelmed by their partners' negativity that they respond in a hostile, defensive manner or withdraw. During negative interactions people release excess amounts of stress hormones, which create a feed-back loop with the anxiety-provoking thoughts and emotions that are experienced, making it more difficult to break out of the cycle of negativity. In marriages that are full of negativity spouses become hypervigilant, expectant of attack and pay attention to the actions that confirm their negative assumptions. Couples who are happily married, however, see the good things in their relationship as relatively stable and are able to dismiss negative interactions and behaviors as fleeting or situational.

Gottman (1984) states that one of the most powerful ways to break the cycle of negativity is to employ repair mechanisms. Repair mechanisms include stopping action (time out), editing (tune out negative aspects of communication), giving partner directions that keep the discussion flowing

in the right direction, keeping on topic, expressing affection or humor. Other techniques include conflict-avoidance, feeling probes, and metacommunication. Couples need to continually celebrate their relationship, share good times and have common goals.

Much of Gottman's research based on observing couples in a lab. There are a number of limitations related to obtaining data in a labratory. For example, sample size is limited, and different relationship stages are not accounted for (Bradbury & Karney, 1993). Burman, Margolin and John (1993) analyzed videotapes of couples engaged in conflict in their home, and found that nondistressed couples engaged in similar negative behavior patterns as conflictual couples, but were able to exit these behaviors patterns relatively quickly. These couples engaged in positive behaviors throughout the conflict. Burman et al.'s study differs from much of the research on conflict in that it observed tapes of couples in their natural environment rather than a labratory. They found that spouses infrequently sit and focus on resolving an issue as they are asked to do in the lab; that conflict continues as they move from room to room and even into their cars.

Gottman's (1994) research highlights the significance of conflict resolution, the importance of expressing positive feelings, and how destructive communication can lead to marital dissatisfaction. He presents a variety of concrete communication skills which people can employ. The

reason, however, that some couples get caught in the cycle of negativity and others do not is unclear. If simply teaching communication skills was enough to make marriages work it seems unlikely that there would be as many divorces as there are today. Underlying issues and insecurities that foster destructive communication are not addressed in his theory, which may explain why changing communication patterns is so difficult.

Gender Issues

Relational Styles

Feld and Urman-Klein (1993) state that gender theory stresses the inherently different relational styles of men and women. According to gender theory, women require more time with their spouse processing their experience, while men tend to be more action oriented and intent on seeking a result or conclusion. The different styles are assumed to engender a great deal of conflict (Feld & Urman-Klein, 1993). From an object relations perspective women wish to communicate with an object of sameness, unconsciously wishing to fuse once more with their lost mothers. They react defensively with anger and/or confusion at finding their object to be different from themselves. While women accuse men of not caring, being too detached or uninvolved, men often react negatively, labeling the woman as too emotional, nonproductive, and dependent. Object relations theory postulates that women have a greater stake in the continuity and cohesiveness of marriage, men a greater stake

in their individuality and external pursuits.

Research on gender differences in personality attributes have had mixed results, but tend not to support stereotypic expectations (Huston & Geis, 1993; Sprecher & Sedikides, 1993). Huston and Geis (1993) studied 106 couples over the first two years of their marriage. The couples completed the Personal Attributes Questionnaire, which measures the extent to which people ascribe themselves with psychological attributes that are stereotypically masculine (independent, active, self-confident) and feminine (kind, tactful, aware of others feeling). They found that husbands and wives were more alike than different in personality and sex roles. Men and women rated themselves as almost equally likely to possess both stereotypically masculine and feminine personality attributes. Although Huston and Geis (1993) found that men describe themselves as more instrumental and women describe themselves as more expressive, gender accounted for only three percent of the variance in instrumentality and expressiveness. Men and women were also found to be similar in their sex role attitudes, although women were somewhat less traditional than men. Spouses who were relatively liberal in their sex role attitudes tended to work more hours for pay outside the home, and be less involved in household work. Huston and Geis (1993) conclude that, although marital behavior reflects cultural values, individual behavior is largely affected by internal and external forces.

There is some evidence of differing gender expressiveness for single people in comparison to married persons. Sprecher and Sedikides (1993) found a small but significant difference in perceptions of emotionality of 197 couples. Women reported experiencing several emotions to a greater frequency than men. Women reported that they were more emotionally expressive than men in dating and engaged relationships, but not in marital relationships. Overall women were not found to be more emotional than men.

Men and women have reported different attitudes towards sex. Michael, Gagnon, Laumann, and Kolata (1994) found that womens' attitudes about sex are more likely to be guided by religious beliefs, and feel that premarital and extramarital sex are wrong than men who were more accepting of sex without love. This study, however, does not distinguish between married and singles leaving open the possibility that the differences found may be smaller for married men and women.

Satisfaction

Studies exploring gender differences in relationships have found that men report higher marital satisfaction, and less physical and emotional symptomatology than married women (Argyle & Furnham, 1983; Gove, Hughes, Style, 1983). The transition to parenthood is perceived as more costly to women, and affects their marital satisfaction more than it affects men (Glenn & Weaver, 1978; Rhyne, 1981; Russel, 1974). Levenson, Carstensen and Gottman (1993) found that

it was only in dissatisfied marriages, however, that wives had more physical and emotional symptomatology than husbands. They argue that confronting marital conflict and attempting to heal an ailing marriage is primarily the responsibility of wives, and affects their physical and mental health. This is reflected in a study by Acitelli (1992), and Kirkpatrick and Davis (1994) who found that women work harder to maintain relationships.

Fowers (1991) found that husbands evaluate their marriages more positively than wives in terms of finances, parenting, family and friends and their partner's personality. The sources of satisfaction between husbands and wives, however, appear to be similar. Rhyne (1981) interviewed 2,190 married people, and found that the bases of marital satisfaction for men and women were similar. For both men and women, the greater the satisfaction with love, affection, and friendship, the greater the satisfaction with the marriage as a whole. Rhyne did conclude, however, that women tend to focus more on the companionship aspects of marriage than men as they rated friendship, interest, and time spouse spent with children as more important than men rated them.

Communication Styles

Tannen (1990) argues that men and women are raised differently and communicate differently. She cites numerous studies to support her contention that women's communication styles are characterized by community, intimacy, symmetry,

connection, and cooperation while men acquire a style characterized by contest, independence, asymmetry, status and competition. Tannen states that misunderstandings between men and women are natural and normal, and that people need to understand that men and women communicate differently. Deakins (1993), in contrast, argues that the gendered communication patterns in our culture are neurotic, not normal, and that the cultural forces that teach men to dominate and women to comply are expressions of sickness, not health. She states that acknowledging dominating and submissive communication styles as normal allows these differences to be used as excuses to continue destructive ways of communicating.

There is, however, mixed research on the notion of gender differences in conflict processes. Markman, Silvern, Clements and Kraft-Hanak (1993) observed premarital couples discussing a relationship problem, and found that women engaged in more attention/listening behaviors than men. There was, however, no evidence that men withdrew more than women or that women pursued more than men. Markman, Silvern, Clements and Kraft-Hanak (1993) studied the escalating patterns of female pursuit (negative affect and complaints) and male withdrawal (cut off contact) that has been identified in distressed samples (Baucom, Sayers, & Sher, 1990; Gottman, 1991) with students from a psychology class. Self-reports of stereotypical gender differences in dating relationships, revealed that men expressed more

complaints about pursuit, but women did not express more complaints about withdrawal.

There is some evidence, however, that gender issues become more predominant in unsatisfactory marriages (Gottman, 1994; Noller, 1982). Although Gottman (1994) reports that 85 percent of stonewallers are men, his research has found that in happy marriages there are no gender differences in emotional expression, and that gender differences only emerged in unhappy marriages. In distressed marriages wives complain about husbands being too rational and husbands object to their wives complaining and emotionality. Men and women tend to differ in their accounts of the reasons for divorce, with women focusing more on relationship factors (Ponzetti, Zvonkovic, Cate, & Huston, 1992), like feeling unloved or belittled, while men complain that their spouses are inattentive, and neglectful of their needs (Gigy & Kelly, 1992).

Fairness and Roles

Wives who have egalitarian values have been found to be less happy than wives with traditional values (Amato & Booth, 1995; Lye and Biblarz, 1993). Lye and Biblarzs' (1993) study indicated that marital satisfaction is greatly reduced when husbands and wives do not share the same attitudes toward female labor force participation, suggesting that in the absence of well-defined adult roles, disagreement with respect to gender roles can lead to conflict.

Suitor (1991) found that satisfaction with the division of labor was a greater determinant of marital happiness than were age, educational attainment, or wives' employment status. Satisfaction seems to be largely connected to fairness as studies have found that marital satisfaction is largely affected by perceptions of fairness in division of labor (Perry-Jenkins & Folk, 1994), and by husbands' sharing of chores traditionally performed by women (Benin & Agostinelli, 1988). Blair (1993), in her study of the effects of employment and marriage characteristics on marital quality, studied 693 couples who participated in a national survey of families. She found that employment characteristics had a minimal effect on marital quality in comparison to marital characteristics. Spouses reported more marital dissatisfaction when there was a perception of unfairness with spending money and division of labor, suggesting that equal division of labour is more important than employment status.

Power

Beavers (1977) discusses healthy families based on the six-year Timberlawn study (Lewis, Beavers, Gossett, & Phillips, 1976), which examined the interactions and functioning styles of healthy families. Beavers reports that in healthy families power is equal and shared. Gray-Little and Burks (1983), in their review of the literature on power and satisfaction in marriage, argue that research in this area has used overly simplistic conceptualizations

of power processes, and is limited by the measurement tools of marital power and marital satisfaction employed. Despite the weaknesses in the research, Gray and Burks (1983) state that the studies have consistently found that marriages in which the wife appears to be dominant are the most likely to be unhappy, whereas the highest levels of satisfaction are more often found among egalitarian couples. According to Gray-Little and Burks, the research on marital power also indicates that coercive control techniques may be related to marital dissatisfaction. Recent studies have had similar findings and report that husbands are usually the more powerful partner in decision making (Felmless, 1994), and that these relationships report higher marital satisfaction than marriages in which the wife is dominant (Aida & Falbo, 1991).

Factors in Long-term Marriages

A number of studies have investigated long-term married couples (Fennel, 1993; Lauer, Lauer & Kerr, 1990; Pearson, 1992; Roberts, 1980; Sporakowski & Hughston, 1978), who reported being satisfactorily and/or happily married. A number of factors emerged as being important in these long-term marriages including the following: love, affection, humor, ability to confide in partner, liking spouse as a person, friendship, commitment, being happy, companionship, enjoying being with spouse, and working together to make a marriage work. Many of these factors have been found to be related to marital satisfaction in other studies. One

difficulty with these studies is that there was not an explanation of the methodology used to analyze the data that were not obtained through structured scales. The average age of participants in these studies was above 50 years, and such a population is likely considerably different from younger couples. Although these studies identify important variables in long-term marriages they do not address the process through which factors such as commitment and love interact to create a long-term marriage.

Levenson, Carstensen and Gottman (1993) studied 156 upper middle class couples who were divided into two cohorts, those between 40 and 50 years of age and those between 60 and 70 years. Older couples reported fewer disagreements, and derived more enjoyment than middle-aged couples. Children were less important sources of conflict, but communication and recreation became greater sources of conflict for the older couples. Dissatisfied couples reported greater disagreement than satisfied couples. Generalizations of this study are limited by the cross-sectional methodology employed and the sample used, which was well educated, and of upper class status.

Dickson (1995) interviewed couples who have been married for 50 years or more. The early analysis of the interviews uncovered three types of marriages including the following: connected couples, functional separate couples, and dysfunctional separate couples. Connected couples are characterized by high levels of closeness, intimacy and

dependency. They are very happy with the relationship and their communication is characterized by respect, humor, politeness and validation. Functional separate couples are highly independent, and emphasize separate activities. Their relationships are, however, supportive, validating and respectful. Spouses in dysfunctional separate marriages are dissatisfied with the relationship. The relationships are distant and their conversations are characterized by disagreement and contradiction.

Factors in Happily Married Couples

Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1995) interviewed 50 couples who described themselves as happily married. Happiness to the couples meant that they felt respected, cherished, and that their love grew with intimacy and appreciation. Respect was based on admiring partners' qualities and believing that spouses are worthy of love. Marriage and family were their number one commitment.

The interviewers found that chores were divided up fairly equally, and saw few differences between husbands and wives in their ability to express feelings and in their attitudes towards the marriage. Couples listened to each other and were able to deeply empathize with each other. They had learned that being tactful was important. They wanted the marriage to work, and being able to anticipate their spouses' distress reactions enabled them to avoid disagreements.

Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1995) described nine

psychological tasks of marriage: (a) detach emotionally from family of origin; (b) build a couple identity, while remaining autonomous; (c) build family while maintaining marital relationship; (d) confront adversities of life in ways that enhance the relationship; (e) make the relationship safe for expressing differences, anger and conflict; (f) establish imaginative and pleasurable sex life; (g) share laughter and humor; (h) provide emotional nurturance and encouragement; (i) sustain innermost core of the relationship by drawing sustenance and renewal from images and fantasies of courtship and early marriage.

Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1995) made a significant contribution to the study of marriage by studying happy marriages through a qualitative method.

Robinson and Blanton (1993) interviewed 15 couples married at least 30 years and described themselves as happy. Unstructured interviews were conducted separately with each spouse. Individuals were asked to talk about the strengths of their spouse, the relationship and themselves. They were asked about times when they felt close to their spouse, times that were difficult and the most important things to know about marriage. Robinson and Blanton developed a model of interrelationships among the characteristics. Intimacy including emotional, physical and spiritual closeness was found to be a central quality impacting and impacted by all other characteristics. Communication enhanced intimacy, commitment and congruence. Congruent perceptions of the

relationship were found to be related to intimacy, commitment and communication. Commitment to spouse as a person enhances intimacy, which in turn enhances commitment. A mutual relationship between commitment and communication emerged. Commitment to the relationship led to the development of communications skills which enabled the resolution of difficulties that may have otherwise hurt the relationship. Religious orientation influenced intimacy, commitment, and communication through moral guidance, emotional, social and spiritual support.

Robinson and Blanton's (1993) model offers an understanding of some of the relationships amongst variables. Unfortunately they so do not describe the processes involved in the data analysis leaving the reader unsure of how constructs were devised.

Stahmann and Salts (1993), based on their review of the marriage research, conclude that the most salient aspects found in happy/satisfied relationships are effective communication, time together for talking, and positive affect. The research also indicates the marriages characterized by similarity, spirituality, sexuality, intimacy, humor, commitment, love, resolution of conflict, fairness, and respect are more satisfactory.

Marriage Enrichment

The research on marriage enrichment most explicitly addresses the relationship between growth and marriage. According to Hof and Miller (1980), marriage enrichment is

based on "a philosophy of growth, and the human-potential hypothesis that all persons and relationships have a great number of strengths and resources, and a tremendous amount of unused potential which can be tapped and developed" (p. 4). During marriage enrichment courses couples are encouraged to see their task as one of continuous growth and adjustment to the realities that face them (Mace, 1987). In the Association of Couples for Marriage Enrichment (ACME), couples examine their relationship, make a "growth plan", and take a year to carry it out, reporting monthly to their support group. According to Mace, a commitment to growth and change will not work for long without an effective communication system and conflict resolution skills, which are taught in the program.

Mace (1982) defines marital growth as a development toward completeness and maturity. He discusses three processes involved in individual and relationship growth.

1) Maturing - what is inherently possible becomes reality. According to Mace a relationship and person develop over time, and this development is complicated by the fact that each partner needs to grow individually and synchronously with spouse.

2) Assimilating - growth is profoundly affected by the environment. Each partner must join their spouse's world draw sustenance from it while being involved in separate activities as well. If the couple maintains intimacy they can grow from these experiences.

3) Adapting - growing involves getting around obstacles that might otherwise hinder growth. Spouses must adapt to their differences and individual growth. Failure to adapt leads to stagnation or marital dissolution.

According to Mace (1982) growth requires flexibility and he states that rigid relationships are a poor medium for growth. He believes that people resist change and need motivation, rewards and a belief that change is beneficial.

Good couple communication involves more than passing on of information (Mace, 1982). It requires that spouses share of themselves including thoughts, feelings, wishes, and intentions. This involves creative listening in which couples learn to listen perceptively to emotional overtones and give an "empathic response". Mace (1982) also recommends that spouses express appreciation, encouragement and affection whenever possible.

Mace (1982) argues that being able to resolve conflict is a key to marital success. He presents a model of conflict which begins when two people want to get closer, and differences between them are tolerated. These differences, however, begin to create tension the closer the couple gets until the tension leads to anger. Closeness becomes uncomfortable and they move away from each other. As the anger diminishes the desire for closeness re-emerges and they move closer together again. Mace calls this the "love-anger cycle". Dealing with conflict constructively improves the relationship and can be a growth experience.

To deal with conflict constructively each disagreement much be sorted through one at a time (Mace, 1982). The anger must be processed and taken out of the conflict. Processing involves agreeing not to attack the spouse which eliminates the tendency to go on the defensive. Spouses help each identify feelings underneath the anger, and a mutually acceptable settlement must be negotiated.

Research on marital enrichment programs has found them to be effective in improving relationships (Giblin, Sprenkle, & Sheehan, 1985; Stahmann & Salts, 1993). Giblin, Sprenkle and Sheehan (1985) conducted a meta-analysis of 85 studies of premarital, marital and family enrichment programs published between 1970 and 1982 and calculated an overall effect size, which is a standardized measure of treatment when compared to either an untreated control group or alternate treatment. They found that 67% of those who participated in enrichment programs were happier than those who had not participated in such programs. Larger effect sizes were reported with observational measures than self report measures, suggesting that participants appear to see less change in themselves following treatment than those who observe them. Forty percent of the studies examined included follow-up measures, which showed significant decreases in effect sizes, but scores did not return to pretest averages. One limitation of meta-analysis is the emphasis on a single summary score.

Stahmann and Salts (1993) in their review of the

literature on enrichment programs conclude that these programs focus on strengths of couples rather than their deficits. They argue that enrichment programs that focus on helping individuals look at themselves, their spouses, families of origin, interpersonal skills and marital expectations are the most productive models.

Limitations of Research

Much of the research on marriage has been correlational in nature and has employed a unidimensional scale of marital satisfaction. Couples are asked to rate their satisfaction on a continuum, which provides little information about the experience of the couple in their relationship. Research using satisfaction/adjustment scales cannot capture the experience of the couples studied.

Although correlational and descriptive studies reveal a variety of variables associated with marital satisfaction, there is little understanding of the inter-relationship between marital satisfaction and variables studied.

Much of the communication research has employed observational methods that allow for objective raters to see relationship aspects, of which the couples themselves may be unaware. This research has provided an abundance of research on communication characteristics, which enlighten some of the differences between satisfying and unsatisfying relationships. Studies of long-term marriages have uncovered important variables characteristic of long-term marriages. Previous research does not, however, address

the complexities of relationships, and the process of developing a successful relationship. Fine and Norris (1989) discuss the advantages of studying intergenerational relationships from a qualitative perspective, which applies to marital research. They state that qualitative data can complement quantitative data, and that "qualitative data tend to be focused on phenomenological, interactional, and emotional dynamics, which more directly address the concerns of family therapy clinicians" (p. 303).

The study proposed here concentrates on the complexities of relationships and how relationships function. The research will focus on marriages in which individual and relationship growth occurs, and will explore the process of creating such a marriage through a qualitative paradigm. This study will enhance the understanding of how the factors associated with marital satisfaction found in previous studies interact and are developed by couples who report being in marriages in which individual and relationship growth occur.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Grounded Theory Approach

The focus of this study is understanding the process involved in creating a marriage, in which individual and relationship growth occurs, as uncovered through the grounded theory approach. Grounded theory is a type of qualitative research that enables the researcher to discover theory from data and is process orientated. In comparison to other modes of qualitative research, grounded theory involves interpretation rather than just description. The development of theory is viewed as continuously evolving and, from this perspective theory, is not refuted but is continually reformulated.

According to Glaser and Strauss (1967) the findings of a study based on grounded theory methodology "... can be presented either as a well-codified set of propositions or as a running theoretical discussion using conceptual categories and their properties" (p. 32). Categories, subcategories and properties are conceptual abstractions that are derived from the data. A category is a conceptual element that stands by itself, whereas a property is an aspect of a category. Categories should be analytic, which means that they are generalized enough to designate entities. The results should be readily understandable and the categories must be clearly indicated by the data. Sensitizing refers to the need for categories to be

meaningful to readers. Grounded theory employs the constant comparative method of data analysis (Glaser & Straus, 1967).

Constant Comparison Method

According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), constant comparison involves looking for key issues early in the process, collecting data which focus on key issues, coding data, and continually looking for more cases.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) present three major types of coding including open, axial and selective coding. These different types of coding do not necessarily take place in stages, and are to be applied with flexibility. During open coding "... data are broken down into discreet parts, closely examined, compared for similarities and differences, and questions are asked about the phenomena as reflected in the data" (p. 62). Each incident is compared with previous incidents in the same and different groups, which leads to the generation of categories. The analyst begins to see the categories dimensions, properties, consequences and relationship to other categories, which leads to axial coding. Axial coding involves putting the data back together by specifying categories in terms of subcategories, which refer to conditions that give rise to it and the context in which it exists. The "context represents the specific set of properties that pertain to a phenomenon" (p. 101). Intervening conditions that pertain to the phenomenon lead to actions devised to manage the phenomenon and result in a particular outcome. Subcategories are related to a

category in the following manner:

> (A) Causal conditions - (B) phenomenon - (C) context - (D) intervening conditions - (E) action/interaction strategies - (F) consequences.

Selective coding refers to the process of discovering and developing the core category, systematically relating categories, and filling gaps in categories. This involves developing a story line which is a conceptualization of a descriptive story about the phenomenon, which becomes the core category. Other categories are related to the core category and the relationships are validated against the data. " ... one is looking to see if they fit in a general sense and in most cases, not necessarily in every single case exactly" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; p. 139).

Throughout the analysis the researcher formulates hypotheses which are recorded as memos. These memos reveal the sequences of action/interaction which are linked to form a sequence or series, which is referred to as process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). These sequences reveal the evolving nature of events and the resulting consequences. The process is " ... the analysts way of accounting for or explaining change" (P. 148).

The findings solidify as fewer and fewer modifications are made. Later modifications clarify logic, eliminate irrelevant properties, and elaborate essential properties. Reduction involves discovering underlying uniformities, which enables the analyst to formulate results with fewer higher level concepts.

The analyst recognizes when incidents do not add new information indicating that categories are saturated and sampling can be discontinued (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This method of sampling contrasts greatly to sampling in quantitative studies and may involve much smaller numbers of cases than in quantitative studies. The grounded theory approach " ... samples incidents and not persons per se!" (P. 177). Since incidents rather than individuals are sampled each interview may refer to multiple examples. Similarities and differences within categories are important, and differences between interviewees adds density to the study.

To ensure grounding of the findings it is important that concepts are generated, systematically related, and that the linkages between categories are well developed with conceptual density. When a study is based on analytic and sensitizing concepts it creates a vivid picture to the reader who is able to grasp the findings.

Grounded theory attempts to capture the multiple constructed realities of participants; a reader, therefore, wants to be sure that the findings reflect subjects' experience. The concept of trustworthiness addresses this issue.

Trustworthiness

A number of techniques and procedures enhance the trustworthiness of a study. These techniques include procedures related to how the study is conducted, how the

results are presented, and whether the findings make sense to others. These techniques are outlined:

1. Prolonged Engagement (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) refers to the importance of the researcher being immersed in the data. Prolonged engagement with the site/interviewees decreases distortions created by an inquirer's presence and allows the researcher to gain sufficient information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In addition, prolonged engagement allows the researcher to develop trust with the participants.

2. Triangulation (Stiles, 1991) involves seeking information from multiple data sources and assessing convergence. Consistency between other sources and one's findings are an important source of validation of one's findings.

3. Debriefing involves having a person who is knowledgeable in the area of the study challenge the researcher to explore their biases, hypotheses and methodological issues. This person can also provide a sympathetic ear for the researcher who may want to share their experience and frustrations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

4. Negative Case Analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) involves asking multiple questions and exploring multiple perspectives. The researcher looks for exceptions to the rules and modifies conclusions accordingly. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that it is unrealistic, however, to expect all cases to fit the general findings.

5. The Constant Comparative Method of Analysis is a clearly defined set of strategies for analyzing data and enhancing trust when closely adhered to (Strauss & Corbin, 1991). Readers can be reassured that data was systematically analyzed

6. Ask "How" and "What", Not "Why" (Stiles, 1991) because people are often better able to answer "how" and "what" questions. According to Stiles (1991) participants may not always know the answers to questions about why they behaved in a particular way and may respond to why questions in a socially appropriate way. Stiles (1991) argues that "what" questions are more likely to call forth stories that can be interpreted.

7. Member Checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) involve checking with the interviewee whether the interviewer's understanding is accurate. This can be done verbally or by having interviewees read the interpretations of the researcher. Interviews, codes and conclusions can be presented to interviewees at several different stages of the research process to check on different questions: Do the interpretations constructed by the researcher make sense to the interviewees? Does the interviewee indicate that they have been understood? Is the subject impelled to reveal deeper material?

8. Description of Internal Processes of Investigator (Stiles, 1991) refers to the documentation of the internal processes of the investigator through memoing. The

researcher comments on how the investigation is affecting him/her, whether they are surprised by the findings, and whether different aspects of the study were found to be difficult. The researcher may go through self-examination and experience personal learning and change, which should be documented. Lincoln and Guba (1985) discuss this in terms of the reflective journaling in which the researcher records information about the logistics of the study, their personal experiences, and methodological decision making.

9. Grounding of Interpretations (Stiles, 1991) means that interpretations should be linked to concrete observations by presenting interpretations with textual material. Categories that have been uncovered should be supported with transcript.

10. Thick Description (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) means that details of participants are reported with the results of the study. Thick description enables readers to judge whether the findings transfer to other situations.

11. Auditability (Sandelowski, 1986) allows the reader to follow the steps and decisions made during the research process. Straus and Corbin (1990) refer to this as "detailing results" and they argue that it is important for researchers to detail their research process when they present their results. According to Sandelowski (1986) auditability is achieved by describing, explaining or justifying the following: (a) how the researcher became interested in the topic; (b) the researcher's pre-

conceptions; (c) the purpose of the study; (d) how participants were obtained and approached; (e) interactional effects between researcher and participants; (f) how the data was collected; (g) the length of data selection; (h) the setting of data gathering; (i) how the data was analyzed; (j) weighting of evidence; (k) specification of categories; and (l) techniques to determine truth value of data.

12. Self-Evidence (Stiles, 1991) refers to whether the results feel right-to the reader and the investigator.

13. Catalytic Validity (Stiles, 1991) means that respondents are energized by the research experience. Catalytic validity exists when the results help people make sense of their experience and empower them to take action.

14. Consensus Among Researchers (Stiles, 1991) refers to whether peers, given the raw data, make similar interpretations or find the interpretations convincing.

15. Bracketing of Preconceptions/Disclosure of Orientation (Stiles, 1991) means that the researchers' preconceptions, values, theoretical commitments, and expectations of the study are explicated.

My preconceptions are discussed in the next section.

Bracketing of Preconceptions

From the perspective of the qualitative paradigm the researcher is the key instrument, and closely connected to the study. In order to reduce the influence of personal biases about the phenomena being studied the researcher uses

self-reflection to identify preconceptions about the area of research, and records personal experiences throughout the research process. Through bracketing the researcher aims to develop a "free relating stance" (Fine & Turner, 1991; p. 310) that enables the researcher to see alternatives and to escape the tyranny of their restricitve viewpoints. The preconceptions that I approached this study with are discussed.

I begin with my reasons for choosing the topic of marriages characterized by individual and relationship growth. I chose to interview people in such marriages rather than a satisfactory marriage because I believe that some married couples may describe themselves as satisfied, but are in marriages that do not enhance personal or relationship growth. My perspective is consistent with Hendrix (1989) who states that many people go through married life as if they were asleep, engaging in routine actions, which give little pleasure.

My work as a psychologist conducting marital therapy serves as a further motivation. I am committed to helping spouses grow together and I seek a deeper understanding of the process involved in creating a marriage in which growth occurs. In addition, I hope to experience continual individual and relationship growth within my marriage. My own parents divorced and I learned little about how to make a marriage successful. From observing my parents' interactions I developed several assumptions about the

ingredients of an unsuccessful marriage. For example, avoiding problems, pretending things are fine when they are not, and holding on to resentments are not conducive to successful marital functioning.

Many of my preconceptions about growth in marriage reflect what I have read in the literature about marriage. The questions I asked couples reflect some of these preconceived notions. For example, I asked about patterns between their family of origin and their relationship with their spouse because I believe that people are greatly influenced by the families they grow up in. I asked questions about how they handle differences and conflict because I believe, and the literature suggests, that the way conflicts are dealt with contributes to the development of improved marital functioning (Gottman, 1991). I asked about commitment, suspecting that it may be a key factor in marriage.

I believe that acknowledging my assumptions has enabled me to really listen to the respondents, see categories I might not otherwise have seen, and listen for unexpected categories. A description of the couples who participated in this study is presented in the next section.

Participants

To participate in the study couples had to be married for more than 10 years, and respond affirmatively to the question "Are you in a relationship which continues to grow, and which fosters your personal growth?". Developmental

theories suggest that the greatest decline in marital satisfaction occurs in the first few years of marriage. During this time couples move from an idyllic stage in which their partner is idolized, to a more realistic stage when incompatibilities become apparent (Kovacs, 1988). The length of marriage for couples interviewed ranged from fifteen to forty-one years, with an average of twenty-five years. The couples were married well over 10 years and had had progressed through many stages of marriage, experienced many difficulties and emerged feeling they had grown from the experiences. The couples interviewed were referred to the researcher by friends, family, colleagues, and one was an acquaintance of the interviewer. None of the couples had attended marital therapy, although one had been to a marriage encounter weekend.

A brief description of the couples' demographic characteristics including current age, age of marriage, length of marriage, profession, and number of children is reported, and a summary table is presented on page 212. Pseudonyms are used to maintain anonymity.

Amanda and Tom

At the time of the interview Amanda and Tom were 53 and 60 years old, respectively, and had been married for 33 years. They dated for about a year before getting married when Amanda was 20 years old and Tom was 27 years old. Tom has a Ph.D in psychology and Amanda completed her master's degree in psychology after being a stay-at-home mother. They

have four adult children.

Barb and David

Barb was 53 years old, David 62 years old, and they had been married 27 years when interviewed for the study. David was divorced when he and Barb met. At the time of marriage David and Barb were 35 and 26 years old, respectively. David is a Chartered Accountant and nearing retirement. Barb returned to school to obtain her teaching degree when her children were school age and now works as a substitute teacher. They have two adult children.

Cindy and Bob

At the time of the interview Cindy was 60 years old, Bob was 65 years old, and they had been married for 41 years. Cindy was 19 years old and Bob was 24 years old when they married. Bob obtained his masters degree in engineering when two of their children were very young and before the birth of their third child. Cindy has some university and taught school prior to staying home with their children. Cindy keeps very busy with volunter work and teaching English as a second language. Bob and Cindy have three adult children.

Debra and Don

Debra and Don were 36 and 39 years old, respectively, when they were interviewed and they had been married for 18 years. Debra was 18 years of age and pregnant at the time of marriage and Don was 21 years old. They report that they would have married within the year even if Debra was not

pregnant. Don has some technical school and Debra has some post secondary schooling. Debra had hoped to stay home with the children, but because of financial reasons, she has worked outside the home throughout their marriage. They have two teenage children.

Elsa and Darren

Elsa was 38 years old and Darren was 39 years old at the time of the interview and they had been married for 18 years. Elsa was 19 years old and Darren was 21 years old when they married. They were married 10 years prior to having children. Darren has a diploma from a technical school and is currently running his own business with the help of Elsa who has a high school diploma. They have two young children.

Fran and Brian

At the time of the interview Fran was 35 years old, Brian was 38 years old, and they had been married 15 years. Fran was 20 years old and Brian was 23 years old when they married. They met each other through a church group and dated for a couple of years prior to marriage. Brian has a high school education. Fran was taking university courses and working part time at the time of the interview. They have three school age children.

Interview Process

Couples were contacted by phone, and informed of the time commitment and interview process. Couples were asked to discuss whether they felt they could answer in the

affirmative to the question "Are you in a relationship which continues to grow, and which fosters your personal growth?", and whether they wanted to participate. All of the couples contacted felt they could answer the question in the affirmative and agreed to participate. (It is interesting to note, however, that I was not flooded by an abundance of referrals, and it took some time to find six couples to interview). An interview time was set up, and all of the couples chose to be interviewed in their home.

Ethical Considerations

Participants were informed of the time commitment and how the information they gave would be handled. They completed consent forms that stated that their names would be kept confidential (Appendix A). The interviews were semi-structured in nature (Appendix B). The interviewer was prepared to deal with any differences of opinion or upsets that occurred during the interview. Had couples become distressed during the interview an appropriate referral would have been made.

Data Analysis

The detailed procedures of qualitative data analysis presented by Strauss and Corbin (1990) were adhered to in this study. The first four interviews were completed and analyzed before the last two interviews took place. All six interviews underwent the same stages of analysis as outlined below:

1. Each interview was transcribed verbatim.

2. Some of the meaning units were paraphrased while others were directly given labels that captured the essence of the meaning unit. Meaning units were often labelled with more than one code.

3. At this point some of the codes were underlined, and became properties, subcategories and categories. The computer program THE ETHNOGRAPH, which assists qualitative researchers to organize their data, was employed at this time. THE ETHNOGRAPH organizes data by codes and categories, which facilitates the development of categories.

4. I went over the codes, properties, and subcategories and asked myself "what's happening here", "what is this about". Much of the data seemed to fall into place fairly easily as I grouped codes into subcategories and then into categories. It was difficult to decide where to place some material that seemed to fit under a number of categories and led to a decision to present properties within descriptions of various categories. This difficulty I believe reflects the complexity of relationship functioning. For example, affection falls under non-verbal communication, caring, support and feeling sexual. Sorting out codes, categories and naming them was an ongoing process as each interview was analyzed and subcategories and categories were continually reworked and relabelled.

5. Meaning units were organized into properties, subcategories and categories. The marriages were viewed as evolving in nature, and the strategies employed by couples

were discovered. Within a category some subcategories and properties served to describe or demonstrate the category. Other subcategories and properties involved a process of development of the category, and still others exemplified how the category affected other categories or the core category.

6. I looked for similarities and differences amongst the transcripts in terms of subcategories, properties and their relationships. I felt that the range of subcategories was saturated such that categories could be well explained, with six interviews.

7. The core category was developed by becoming aware of the relationships among categories. Memoing was used throughout the research to help in determining the core category and conceptualize process. I struggled with naming the core category and finding a way to represent it in a graphic form that would capture the process of relationship development. It evolved slowly over time, as I lost sleep, and lived and breathed my research. It became the topic of many conversations with supervisors, family and friends who helped me consolidate my thoughts by reflecting back to me what they heard as I spoke incessantly about my dissertation.

8. I then went back to the transcripts to validate the findings. At this time further quotes were added to the results, which further exemplified the categories/subcategories.

9. Additional comments were incorporated into the results from follow-up interviews with five of the couples. I was unable to contact the sixth couple.

Example of Data Analysis

Meaning unit (473-475): ... because we shared the situations we could always talk about it ...

Property: Talk

Subcategory: Communicating

Category: Connecting Emotionally

Ensuring Trust

Since qualitative research attempts to capture the multiple constructed realities of participants, the reader wants to be sure that the findings do in fact reflect the participants' experiences. A number of techniques were used to ensure trust.

Based on the belief that marriage is best understood holistically and in a natural setting, interviews were conducted in couples' homes. I interviewed participants in a conversational manner and asked "how" and "what" questions in an attempt to encourage interviewees to access their internal processes so that I could interpret their responses. My experience as a therapist with cultivated listening skills facilitated the interview process and increased the credibility of my study.

According to Allan (1980), there are several advantages to interviewing couples together. He states that obtaining two accounts rather than one will provide more information,

and the bias in one story will balance the other. More importantly, he states that the researcher is able to observe the couple interacting as they create their accounts, which results in information of spousal behavior that would not be obtained if interviewing couples separately. Allan (1980) states that the risk that couples will be reluctant to share information if their spouse is present is related to the quality of the couples relationship. I interviewed the couples together because I was interested in the couples' joint story and observing their interaction. Based on the quality of the marriages of the couples interviewed I believe that any reluctance to share with the interviewer because of the spouse's presence was minimal. I suspect that if I had conducted separate interviews the stories would at times have been different. I found that some spouses were less introspective and/or less verbal. I think it would have been very interesting to have interviewed couples separately followed by a joint interview.

In depth interviews increase the likelihood that the study represents the reality of participants. The couples were initially interviewed for a two to three hour period. Two of the couples reviewed the transcripts of their interview along with a brief summary of the researchers' understanding of their relationship development. I then met with them to discuss their reaction, and asked further questions. I shared the final analysis with the last four

couples and discussed their reactions, which were all very positive, and supportive of the findings.

I kept in contact with my supervisors, and a fellow qualitative researcher to discuss data analysis, and my reactions as I conducted the research. I had a psychologist read a transcript, code it, and we discussed her responses. Her coding was remarkably consistent with the researcher's coding. Theoretical sensitivity was increased by drawing upon marriage literature, and personal and professional experience.

Prior to the interviews I explored and documented my preconceptions about marriage. I made field notes after each interview describing the setting, my reactions and feelings, which generally consisted of how inspired I felt by the very strong feelings these couples had for each other.

Further contributing to trust in this study was the adherence to the constant comparison method of data analysis, which was documented. Transcript to support categories and triangulation of results by comparing results to literature on marriage, comparing transcripts between couples and between spouses also contribute to trust in this study.

The results of the study are presented in the next Chapter.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

EMPOWERING CONNECTIONS

The results presented in this section describe the process involved in creating a marriage, in which both individual and relationship growth occurs. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967) there are two essential ingredients of a grounded theory approach: conceptual categories and the properties that define them; and hypotheses or generalized relations among the categories and properties. The results presented here embrace these two elements. Given the small sample size, however, the results are to be viewed as preliminary in nature.

The core category that emerged in this study is "Empowering Connections", which refers to relationships that energize people to exercise their inner strengths to better themselves and their relationship. Empowering connections are characterized by four categories: "Connecting Emotionally", "Loving Respectfully", "Expanding One's Self", and "Experiencing Empowering Connections". Each category is divided into subcategories, which exemplify categories. Some subcategories contain subheadings of properties which refer to characteristics of categories and subcategories. Since the growth process is recursive categories, subcategories and properties are discussed throughout the results section to explicate their interconnectedness. The categories that emerged are briefly described.

Empowering connections continually evolve and create energy. This energy propels spouses forward in their lives and results in a cycle of never-ending individual and relationship growth. Relationships characterized by empowering connections spiral upwards and become more, and more rewarding. The development of empowering connections involves "Connecting Emotionally", "Loving Respectfully", "Expanding One's Self", and "Experiencing Empowering Connections". These categories are interconnected, and they build on each other as couples continually move through them. In Figure A (page 89), one cycle of the four phases of "Empowering connections" is presented. The downwards motion of the circle refers to the conflicts and crises that couples inevitably experience during their marriage. In Figure B (page 90) the continuous spiral of "Empowering Connections" is displayed.

"Connecting Emotionally" is the first category in the development of empowering connections. Connecting emotionally begins with feeling attracted to partners and developing a friendship. Through talking and listening couples get to know each other. The connection between spouses deepens as they share deeply about themselves. When couples are connected and communicating they can work through differences and conflicts. This process of resolution is reflected by the downwards motion of the circle which inevitably spirals up (see Figure A and B). The circle inevitable spirals up as the crisis or conflict

is resolved. The connection between couples is based on "Loving Respectfully", which involves respecting, caring, and feeling secure. Couples interact in ways that reflect their caring and respect for each other, which inspires them to continue to treat each other with respect and meet each other's needs. When spouses feel secure in the relationship they are empowered to take risks and grow. Connections based on respecting, caring and feeling secure create synergy, which empowers spouses to grow and "Expand One's Self". Expansion involves developing self-confidence, growing from turning points, and growing from differences. As spouses grow and try new things they are continually changing, which enhances the attraction between them. "Experiencing Empowering Connections" involves feeling energized, romantic, and sexual, which motivates partners to continue to communicate and work through difficulties. Their positive feelings about their relationships are displayed in their verbal and non-verbal communication, which fosters more respect, care, and security. "Loving Respectfully" leads to more synergy empowering spouses to grow, which re-energizes the relationship. In this manner, the relationship spirals upwards, becoming more and more rewarding.

A summary of the categories, subcategories, and properties is presented in Table 1 on page 88.

Table 1

Categories, Subcategories and Properties in Empowering Connections

Category:	**Connecting Emotionally**		
Subcategories:	Beginnings	Communicating	Resolving Conflict
Properties:	Developing Friendships	Talking	Understanding
	Feeling Attracted	Listening	Facilitating Attitudes
	Trusting	Persisting	Persisting

Category:	**Loving Respectfully**		
Subcategories:	Respecting	Caring	Feeling Secure
Properties:	Accepting	Caring Behaviors	Being Committed
	Prioritizing	Wanting the Best	Building Security
	Enhancing Relationship	Supporting	
		Meeting Needs	

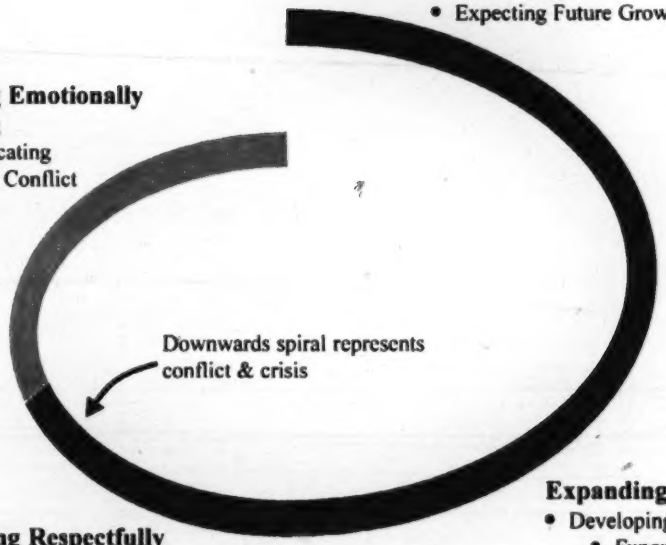
Category;	**Expanding One's Self**		
Subcategories:	Developing Self-Confidence	Turning Points	Growing from Differences
Properties:	Persisting	Persisting	
	Encouraging	Encouraging	
	Expanding Opportunities	Parenting	

Category:	**Experiencing Empowering Connections**			
Subcategories:	Feeling Energized	Deepening the Connection	Feeling Romantic	Expecting Growth
Properties:	Enhancing Relationship	Wanting to be Together	Feeling Sexual	

ONE CYCLE IN EMPOWERING CONNECTIONS

Experiencing Empowering Connections
- Feeling Energized
- Deepening the Connection
- Feeling Romantic
  - Feeling Sexual
- Expecting Future Growth

Connecting Emotionally
- Beginning
- Communicating
- Resolving Conflict



Expanding One's Self
- Developing Self-Confidence
  - *Expanding Opportunities*
- Turning Points
- Growing From Differences

Loving Respectfully
- Respecting
  - *Accepting*
  - *Prioritizing*
  - *Enhancing Relationships*
- Caring
  - *Caring Behaviors*
  - *Supporting*
  - *Meeting Needs*
- Feeling Secure
  - *Being Committed*
  - *Building Security*

EMPOWERING CONNECTIONS

Connecting Emotionally

Loving Respectfully

Expanding One's Self

Experiencing Empowering Connections

* Connecting Emotionally *

Table 2

Subcategories and Properties in Connecting Emotionally

Subcategories:	Beginnings	Communicating	Resolving Conflict
Properties:	Developing Friendships	Talking	Understanding
	Feeling Attracted	Listening	Fascilitating Attitudes
	Trusting	Persisting	Persisting

Three subcategories are discussed in this section: "beginnings", "communicating", and "resolving conflict". Under the subcategory "beginnings", the process through which early attractions develop into "Emotional Connections" is described. Communicating involves a number of processes, which are outlined, and the process of working through communication impediments is described. Connecting emotionally facilitates resolving conflict, and motivates couples to employ behaviors which de-escalate conflict. The couples interviewed have attitudes towards conflict which promote conflict resolution, and have developed strategies to resolve conflict. The emotional connections that are developed continue to grow as the friendship, attraction, trust, communication and conflict resolution skill develop.

Beginnings

Four of the six couples interviewed had short engagements. All six of the couples, however, describe similar processes of relationship growth, which involved developing friendships and feeling attracted to partners.

The individual stories are different, but the processes are similar. These stories are presented following the description of the common processes.

Feeling Attracted, Developing Friendships, and Trusting

The physical and emotional attraction between couples was strong from the beginning. Physical attractions turn into friendships as couples talk, get to know each other, and develop a sense of trust. When partners feel comfortable being themselves with spouses, they are able to talk openly. This develops closeness between them and is the foundation of connecting emotionally:

> Barb: There was something about him that I really liked right away. I guess because he was quiet and gentle and a warm person ... We just seemed to be able to be ... friends ... I think I found with (David) I could be natural, I didn't have to pretend I was something I wasn't ... maybe that was the turning point, that's what was so appealing for me ... and I guess one of the things when we were first dating, we used to talk a lot and ... I guess that's one of the places where we kind of built the foundation ...
>
> David: ... we were so open with each other that it was like, here it is, and we just laid the cards out very unconsciously ...
>
> Elsa: ... we were very good friends right from the beginning ...
>
> Fran: ... we were honest with each other fairly early on and ... shared really personal things and that kind of brought us closer together ...

Through talking, couples learn that they have common values. This further contributes to the connection and friendship. Cindy's first response to the question of what attracted them to each other was: "hormones". Upon further

reflection, she noted that it was important to have someone with similar values:

> Cindy: ... someone who might have some of the same interests as I do ... and life values ... and if that hadn't been there ... I doubt if the hormones and fun would have maybe lead to a marriage ... He's just too good to let get away ...

Although couples have common values they also have differing beliefs. The simmilarity of values and interests, however, outweigh the differences:

> David: nobody is 100%, but I think we had such a large commonality of what we wanted that we could live with the rest ... I think we came up with the same values ...

An important common belief system amongst five of the couples interviewed is spirituality:

> Barb: ... church has been important ... I could say initially maybe more important for me. I have more of a background than (David's) did, but I think he has kind of caught up to where I am, and maybe even surpassed me (laughs) in some respects ... I think it's been a really important part of our life.
>
> Cindy: ... church has always been a strong part of our life.
>
> Brian: We walk the same ... spiritual journey. We may not be right beside each other but we're on the same path. So we can relate to where we're at, how we're feeling ...

For the one couple who were not religious, an agnostic viewpoint was something they had in common:

> Elsa: ... we did not get married in a church because well, this is something we both agreed on, right from the beginning ...

Spouses are attracted to each other's personality. They focus on the positive aspects of their spouse's

personality that attracted them:

> Debra: ... His caring for other people and his work ethic, certainly two things (I was attracted to) ...
>
> Fran: ... so to me he represented quite a bit of security and stability ... yet not in a stifling way. There was some spirit of adventure there as well ... he was very fun.

Attractive personality traits of spouses are sometimes related to being similar or different to a family member. Spouses who describe negative situations with parents often report that they were looking for someone different than their parent:

> Barb: ... my dad was a kind person in his own way but, not a very deep person, I guess you could say somewhat shallow of a person ...
>
> Interviewer: Do you think you were looking for somebody different than your father?
>
> Barb: Well, more than likely ... because if you think about it if you have turmoil in your life like that (you want something different)... (David) was so quiet and reserved ... It was just sort of different, and maybe there was a sense of stability there, maybe that's what it was ...

David reminds her of her mother, with whom she was close:

> Barb: ... and my mother was a much warmer, caring person ... that I can see in (David)...

Fran was conscious of wanting to marry someone very different from her parents. Her parent's were alcoholics and had violent arguments. Brian, in contrast, was calm and stable:

> Fran: ... my home situation was not great so I was kind of looking for an opportunity to leave ... It was like a breath of fresh air, or maybe, a glimpse of what life could be like ... he didn't have a violent temper, he wasn't extremely moody

> and withdrawn. He didn't have a gambling addiction or alcohol addiction ... sometimes when you go looking for the opposite or something, you still end up with what you don't want, but to me, it was quite evident that, those things were not there ...

The stories of relationship development are unique for each couple. Many of the stories, however, highlight the ability to talk to each other, which fostered the growth of their friendship. Brief descriptions of the beginnings of the relationship for each couple follow.

The weekend after he met Amanda, Tom told two doctoral students that he had found the girl he was going to marry. Amanda feels that she was naive and did not realize that Tom was creating excuses to see her again. She was physically attracted to Tom and liked his personality. Most importantly, however, Amanda and Tom felt they were able to talk openly with each other:

> Amanda: I thought he was very handsome, he has wonderful eyes, and I liked the way he was with kids, and the way he treated me ... warm, caring ... I thought we were able to talk.

David and Barb met each other at a social gathering and married within the year. They report that they clicked from the very beginning and had developed a good understanding of each other early on. Barb liked the fact that David was quiet, gentle, warm, and very stable. When they met, David was divorced. He had been married for about a year to a woman he describes as dishonest and manipulative. He states that he was looking for someone who was straightforward and believed that he and Barb could be very honest with each

other:

> David: ... (the divorce) really made me more conscious of people and ... I would say when (Barb) first met me I ... had a shell around me and it was really tight ... I could tell from her what type of person she really was like ... there was no artificialness between us. We were both (open), and that's the thing I liked about (Barb), she was very open, straightforward and ... she's the one person you can pretty well say anything to.

Cindy and Bob met at a church function and were married within the year. Cindy and Bob became closer as they shared their sadness about the negative reaction of Bob's mother to Cindy:

> Cindy: (Bob's) mom didn't think I was good enough to marry her son, but then no one would have been in principle ... the letter ... we read up above the river bank on the High Level Bridge and I cried and you cried ...

Debra was 18 and pregnant when she and Don became engaged. They met in November and were engaged in January. Debra found out she was pregnant in February, their son was born in August, and they were married in October. Debra and Don state that they would have eventually married even if there had not been a pregnancy. Don reports that he was very attracted to Debra for a number of reasons:

> Don: ... she was the colorful person that I wanted to get married with. Like she was pretty and she was bright, always laughing, humorous and, makes life exciting ... I liked her relationship with children ... it was exciting to see her play with them ...

Elsa and Darren began dating in high school and were together for two years before marriage. During this time their relationship grew, and they became very good friends.

Elsa and Darren have common values, common interests and have a lot of fun together. They report that most of their spare time was spent together as they built a friendship based on trust:

> Darren: ... we were always with each other ... we became friends ... and built a trust. I know that if there's a problem she will be there to stand by me ... and you don't find that often and I can deal with her in good faith ...

Fran and Brian state that their two year courtship was an important period of learning for them. During this time, Fran became less possessive, learned she could not force Brian to want to be with her, and was able to let go of her demands on him:

> Fran: ... I was kind of possessive of him in the (beginning of our) relationship ... But there came a time when I kind of realized that you can't force people to love or force people to want to be with you ... I kinda let go and, that was a really good thing for me ... It went from a dependent type of relationship to a interdependent one. And it was good that we had that time, I think, rather than moving out of home right into a marriage ...

Developing a friendship early in the relationship provides a strong foundation from which relationship growth occurs. The **emotional connection** between couples deepens as they continue to communicate openly with each other.

Communicating

Non-verbal and written communication can deepen emotional connections. Communicating, which involves talking and listening leads to understanding, which fosters emotional connections. Openly communicating involves sharing everything and making time to talk. Couples

experience a variety of communication impediments and persistence is required to resolve them, and grow from the experience.

Non-verbal communication can send very important messages. It can display positive feelings between couples and make spouses feel better about themselves:

> Debra: ... lots of hugs ... greetings at the door ... kind words and deeds ... thinking of the other person's well being ...
>
> Fran: ... physical proximity, eye contact ... those are things I kind of pick up on ... and these little things ... I felt they kind of built me up and made me feel better about myself ...

Writing is also an important mode of communication. For Cindy and Bob, writing was an essential method of communication when they lived in separate cities for a year during their engagement:

> Cindy: ... we wrote to each other every day ... And I have burned all the letters ... they were for us and nobody else.
>
> Bob: they self ignited.

Talking and Listening

Couples talk and listen to each other, which builds understanding and trust. Understanding and trust, reciprocally, encourage talking and listening. Communication emotionally connects couples.

Couples report that they enjoy talking about their problems with each other and find that difficulties are easier to deal with when they are shared:

> Elsa: ... we talk about each other's day ... and then you've got a sounding board. It's a nice

release ...

> Tom: We talk about our problems ... and we like to do that.
> Amanda: ya , ya, it's fun ... he understands what I'm feeling.

When couples talk and listen to each other they develop an understanding of the other person's feelings, thoughts and behaviors:

> Debra: ... talking makes things go a lot smoother ... And there's a lot more understanding where the other person's coming from.

> Barb: He doesn't have to have answers, it's just someone to say it to ... and that's important ... someone who will listen to you, even if you sound like a babbling idiot, you have to have someone you can communicate with, someone that will just hear all the stuff you have to say whether it's relevant to what they're doing or anything ... Even ideas, even your wildest dreams or ideas and we do a lot of that ... and I think you need to do a little dreaming.

Feeling listened to and understood creates a positive cycle of open communication. Facilitating this cycle is the development of a sense that one can trust one's spouse with feelings and personal information. Feeling understood builds trust. This enables spouses to be more honest with their feelings and truly let their partner know everything about them:

> Don: ... I think that's probably one of the biggest things you learn is to trust your partner with your feelings...

The friendships, in which spouses feel they can be themselves without having to hide parts of themselves, foster open communication:

> Cindy: ... I guess we're awfully honest with each other. I tell him everything that's wrong with

> him and he tells me everything that's wrong with me and we're still with each other ... We can very easily tell each other off. I suppose friendship in some way means that you can be pretty honest ...

Communication means that spouses are clear about what their partner does that makes them angry:

> Brian: If I was out every night of the, every week or something then that wouldn't be very good. I'm sure I would hear about it ...

Further facilitating open communication is respect (see subcategory "respecting" under category "Loving Respectfully"). People are more open with their partner when they know their feelings will be respected. Although they may not always agree with each other, they will listen to and respect each other's viewpoints:

> Darren: Because you have a lot of respect ... she's my closest friend. I can tell (Elsa) absolutely anything, and I tell her everything, there are no secrets.

This openness brings spouses closer together and deepens the emotional connection. Barb and Fran describe this process:

> Barb: ... to share things and talk to another person and communicate on a different level ... you have friends that you share with too but when you're living with this person I guess you share absolutely everything and, with a friend you might not share everything ... it's being able to share all the ideas ... Sharing personal things builds closeness.

> Fran: ... you share really personal things and that kind of ... brought us closer together ... you can really form a good bond ... and we enjoy being with each other and talking ... we're each other's best friend ...

Making time for communicating is important. Involvement

with work, school, and children means that couples have to juggle a number of commitments. Couples make their relationship a priority, which means they make an effort to find time to connect. Talking about daily routines, problems at work, and emotional struggles reconnects spouses when they find themselves losing touch with each other.

> Barb: We'll have times when maybe we're too busy to talk but I think we still take that time, if we're walking or something, to talk about different things like, things that are bugging him at work, things that bug me at work.

Couples describe a number of growth processes involved in working through communication impediments. They highlight the importance of talking about feelings, not just facts. For many of these couples, resolving communication impediments involve being very persistent. The resolution was considered a turning point (see this subcategory under category "Expanding One's self") in the marriage, at times. The couples' stories are described below.

Although Amanda and Tom feel that they were able to talk openly in the early part of their marriage, Tom had difficulties letting Amanda know when he was upset or angry with her. He was afraid that she would not be able to handle his anger. Tom realized he had been keeping his upsets with Amanda to himself after a friend pointed out that he and Amanda seldom argued. He decided that he needed to do something different and take a risk. Tom reports that this involved trusting himself and he slowly started to be more open and honest with his negative feelings. He learned

that Amanda was stronger than he had originally thought and that she could cope very well with his anger. This occurred early in their marriage and was a turning point in the relationship. It meant that Tom could be completely known by Amanda and not protect her from his angry feelings:

> Tom: ... and I remember thinking about that and sort of thinking, well ... I've got to (tell her when I'm upset), and ... she did something that I didn't like and I thought I have to trust myself and slowly started doing that and I don't know if we had been married a year by then ... I started to be more honest and open and authentic about expressing negative feelings and not just positive...

Learning to share all of their feelings came later in Debra and Don's relationship, when they attended a marital enrichment program. They felt that they were in a rut and that their relationship had become routine and distant. They were busy with different activities and were not making the effort to spend time together. Debra was really excited about going to a marriage enrichment weekend, but Don was reluctant. Although he knew inside that the marriage was not as good as it could be, he was uncertain about change. Debra persisted and eventually Don agreed to go.

Debra and Don report that attending the marriage enrichment course was a turning point in their relationship. They were given a topic and separately wrote their feelings about the topic and then shared their responses. They began to talk about their feelings and to trust each other with their inner emotions. Debra reports that they found this enlightening:

> Debra: ... they'd pick a topic and say just write how you feel about it ... so then you'd both go separately and write whatever your answer was and then share it together. And that certainly was eye opening. Because you ... think you know somebody inside out and ... then to read this, "whoa" ... so that was eye opening ... With the help of a marital enrichment follow-up group they have been able to continue sharing their new way of communicating. They also teach a pre-marriage course which reminds them of important communication skills.

Elsa did not easily express her feelings when she married Darren, but with Darren's encouragement she has become very comfortable with expressing herself. Elsa reports that there was not a lot of communication between her parents and she learned, from Darren, how to express feelings. Darren grew up in a home where all emotions were expressed and he easily expresses whatever he is feeling. Darren persistently asked Elsa what she was thinking and feeling and over time she has become more vocal. In this manner one partner can trigger growth in the other:

> Interviewer: Any ideas how you have been able to open up with (Darren)?
>
> Elsa: Because of his support. Because he'd say ... "tell me what you are thinking" ...
>
> Darren: and I said to her ... "if something's bugging you don't hold it in, let it out"...

Early in their relationship, Fran found it difficult to share her feelings with Brian. She feels that her difficulty expressing herself was related to growing up in an abusive home, which left her fearful of opening up to people. In her parental home, she learned that difficult situations should be avoided and not talked about. Fran

felt that Brian was interested in her feelings and wanted to completely know her. This motivated her to openly express feelings. As she slowly expressed more feelings with Brian and he listened and supported her, she grew to trust him. When Fran became more expressive Brian became more aware of her emotions and more sensitive to her non-verbal messages.

Ironically, as Fran learned to express her deep feelings, they became aware of Brian's difficulty verbalizing his emotions. Although Brian feels that there is not anything he cannot say to Fran, he struggles with articulating his inner feelings:

> Brian:... I'm not that articulate. That's the bad part ... Our marriage could be better if I was a bit more communicative ... but ... there's nothing I cannot really say.

Fran tries to help him express himself by sharing her own experiences. Knowing him well enables her to perceive when to quit pushing Brian to open up. She has learned that timing is important and that Brian is much more able to express himself at the moment rather than reflecting back on an experience.

Resolving conflict is central for couples who are emotionally connected.

Resolving Conflict

Connecting emotionally facilitates the resolution of conflict. Sorting though conflicts can deepen the connection. Couples, in marriages characterized by individual and relationship growth, are motivated to resolve

conflict. This involves understanding each other. They have attitudes towards conflict that de-escalate conflict. They view conflicts as healthy and as opportunities for growth. Working through conflict requires being persistent at times, and this persistence leads to growth in their spouse and their relationship.

Understanding

Communicating facilitates connecting emotionally and is an essential ingredient in resolving conflict: before it escalates and in working through conflict once it has escalated. When couples are connecting emotionally they are talking, listening, and understanding their spouse. Listening to each other's feelings and concerns facilitates understanding and intercepts unnecessary misunderstandings:

> Brian: ... communicate. Not to let problems develop ... Deal with them, deal with them fast ... and try to not let your pride get in he way
>
> Fran: on occasion ... I feel like things are spiralling out of control ... I have come to the point and say ... this is not a good situation. as an opener for discussion or support or something ...
>
> David: ... a lot of times we headed off conflict by being open to listening to the other person ... we'd feel it coming so we talk about it enough that we see it through without letting this thing get us too far apart ...

Couples maintain their emotional connection in relation to day to day activities by discussing plans and keeping each other informed about schedules. This leaves opportunity to work out differences of opinions about plans before commitments are made:

> Brian: ... but for me to say I'm going out tomorrow or something will that work with your schedule?
>
> Fran: ... and learning what works with the other person ... he has learned to give me as much notice as possible if plans are changed, and I'm learning to accept the spontaneity and not get all in a big flap about it ... so there's definitely a sense of give and take.

When spouses respect each other, they want to resolve conflict. They are motivated to work through conflict because they want to maintain and deepen their connection. Knowing that one is loved and cared for feels good to couples and outweighs the unpleasantness of conflict that does occur. In Cindy's words "... there is just too much to lose to not make it work". Fran echoes this:

> Fran: ... we don't like to have disharmony in our relationship. It doesn't feel good. So we would like to try to work it out before it gets to that point ...
>
> Don: It's like best friends... If you're best friends then you know you're going to have conflicts, and you're going to resolve them and, you're going to be best friends ...

When conflict arises, couples communicate with each other until they can understand the problem and resolve it. The communication that occurs when couples resolve conflict results in a growing understanding of each other. They are motivated to talk, listen and understand each other's point of view when they disagree:

> David: ... I think that just the fact of having an interest in each other ... we are interested in the other person ... and really try to see their point of view and what they want to do ... When you have a real interest in a person you're with ... you listen to them more ...

Some of the couples mentioned that conflict occurs when they are not connecting, but are drifting apart:

> David: ... we want to do it together. If we drift apart then I think that's where we'll have a conflict, we aren't doing it together ... and I think that's when we sit down and say ... we've always been a team and we ... work together and I think we just re-establish ourselves ...

Listening is difficult when one feels very strongly about something. Some of the couples report that exchanges become heated at times and may then take a time out from discussing the issue:

> Barb: .... when I really have a bee in my bonnet about doing something. Then I find it really hard to see his viewpoint ... Like maybe we're at loggerheads about something ... I just say FINE you don't want to deal with it, fine, and I usually walk away. And then things kind of simmer down and ... we get a new perspective on things, and then we sort of approach it from a different angle I think.

During a time out, couples calm down and try to understand their spouse's point of view. When they return to sort through the conflict, they may end up trying to say what they meant more clearly and/or apologizing for what they did say:

> Debra: ... there's still times that you kind of ... think "ooh, this just burns me up", but if you calm down a little bit, it really isn't that serious.
>
> Don: I try to see the other person's point of view ... stand in their shoes ... If you don't think about it you don't understand why they're upset.
>
> Cindy: ... I think we go back to it. I can just hear myself saying "look when I said that I meant" ... or "I did that because" ...

For other couples, arguments remain fairly calm:

> Fran: ... usually if we are having a, quote, fight, the most that comes out of it is we raise our voices with each other. We don't, I wouldn't say we yell at each other ... it doesn't go on hours or anything like that ...

Resolving conflict involves prioritizing issues and determining how important an issue really is. If it is not a big issue for either member of the couple, they are able to put it aside. If it is very important to one of them, the other will try to listen and understand why it is an issue for them:

> David: ... sometimes the issue doesn't even have to be dealt with ... it was a non-issue. And I think sometimes you just put it aside cause it's not that important ... but I think if it was really an issue it will surface again, and I think that's the time when depending on who is really affected by it, the other one has a tendency to sit and listen, and think well is it really that important to me...

Facilitating Attitudes

Couples have attitudes towards conflict that facilitate the de-escalation of conflict. Attitudes that reflect respect, a willingness to not always get one's way, appreciating humor, and viewing conflict as valuable facilitate the resolution of conflict.

Spouses report that because they respect each other, they try not to engage in behaviors that they know upset their partner:

> David: ... I think we both have enough respect for each other that we seem to know what is worthy of a real fight ... I always say that if that person's your best friend you won't do things to your best friend that you'll do to somebody else. You will be considerate ...

> Elsa: I think we've always been on sort of the same wave length ... I wouldn't go out and buy a five hundred dollar suit ... it's just never been that way ... I think when you care for someone you don't want to hurt anyone's feelings ...
>
> Fran: ... I think we give each other the freedom to do what we really want to do. We can .. stay out when we like, but generally because we know each other so well, we know what we can do and the other person won't mind. ...

Resolving conflict may require working together to find a compromise, and spouses learn that they can not always get their own way:

> Don: ... agree to disagree, but compromise too at the same time ... And we may not get exactly what we want but I guess we're comfortable enough that the topic will die ...
>
> Elsa: ... there's nit picky things that we go through but ... just a lot of compromising and, and talking it out ...

Couples can accept not always having their way when they know that eventually their needs will be met. For a number of people interviewed, learning to be less selfish and more considerate of their spouse was a lesson they wanted to learn; it was an opportunity for growth:

> Barb: ... when he gets determined he won't budge ... I just have to sit back and say ... somewhere along the way we'll likely do something I want to do, so you know it evens out somewhere ... I guess it's sort of putting things in perspective too. Is it that important to get all out of sync with it and I have to learn also to give. I think being the baby of the family, I always tended to get my own way ... so I have to grow up (laughs).

Partners are able to separate their spouse's anger from a personal attack. When spouses express anger, partners are able to keep from taking it too personally because they know they are still loved and cared for even when their partner

is angry. "Loving respectfully", which involves respecting, caring and feeling secure buffers couples from the escalation of anger and conflict:

> Tom: I think we can honestly say that, while we've raised our voices and been frustrated by each other's behaviors, it's been very seldom that we have felt the other person was attacking our person, a few times ... that I wasn't criticizing her behavior but that I was squelching her as a human being. I don't know why that is, I don't think that what I've said is any different from what other husbands have said to their wives, but she's not seeing that as an attack on her being and likewise for me ... whether that is just that we think each other is great, and we know that, therefore it's not an attack on me, the person.
>
> Amanda: No, I think it's part of just the way we interact with one another, it's hard to be mad at someone who puts their arm around you ... there's respect for my feelings. I never feel put down by him, if I'm wrong on something I never feel put down by the way he responds or talks about his anger ...
>
> Debra: ... We never fight in front of the kids. We never ever fight in front of someone else. We never belittle each other. Like, you're such a pinhead; never ever that kind of stuff ... We respect each other. I may not agree with his viewpoint on some things but I certainly respect the right for him to feel that way, or to have that viewpoint ... even in conflict there's a lot of love and respect for the other person ...

In addition, couples reported that they did not dredge up past resentments. This may have contributed to their ability to keep from feeling personally attacked:

> Fran: ... and we can separate it from the rest of our relationship for the day ... and we don't hold it against each other. We don't have this big bag where we keep track of all this stuff ... I don't know if we ever had the type of fight where we start dredging up (the past) ...

Humor buffers the relationship from conflict. Couples

find that being able to laugh at themselves, each other, and the moment brings things into perspective.

> Cindy: ... and if I had to say what got us over some rough bumps I would think a sense of humor ... If you laugh at someone long enough ... you realize that wasn't such a big thing you know ...

Many of the spouses report that conflict can be viewed in a positive light. Conflict can lead to excitement and growth in relationships and is, therefore, valued. Cindy appreciates the fact that Bob has strong feelings and that the differences between them contribute to the excitement in their relationship:

> Cindy: Some people say they never fight and never door slam ... I just can't figure those relationships out, they must be awful boring. I guess it's personalities ... I don't think I could stand him being so insipid that you never did get angry.

> Fran: ... I want to be in a relationship where you do occasionally rub shoulders and try and rub the rough spots off because I'm committed to a process of changing and growing ...

Persisting

Working through conflict can be difficult. Couples describe different struggles, which often require being persistent, and results in individual and relationship growth.

Amanda and Tom had difficulties early in their relationship when Tom wanted to resolve conflict immediately and Amanda would withdraw from him. He would become frustrated and persistent in trying to make her talk:

> Amanda: ... he'd keep after me until I got annoyed (chuckle) and than I would talk ... That was great

> because it just would have festered, and now it doesn't take me as long ... I actually felt much better, rather than pulling inside, but to begin with it was very difficult ... When I grew up (mother) pretended that there was nothing wrong, part of my not wanting to be like her motivated my willingness to change, but it's hard when you've learned one behavior ... and there's still a part of me that at times has to push me to speak, old habits die hard (laugh).

Sometimes Bob has difficulties telling Cindy what is really upsetting him. When his emotions run high enough, however, everything comes out at once. Cindy understands this personality trait of his, at the same time she persists in trying to help him express what is at the root of his upset:

> Cindy: ... I think I have to work more at getting you to tell me what it was that bugs you. What the real problem ... What's really bothering you. You don't find it as easy to say as I do ...

Fran and Brian have had to find a period of time-out that they are both comfortable with:

> Brian: If we get in a dispute my personality likes to settle things right now. Lets deal with it and lets be finished with it. (Fran's) a little bit different. It takes quite a bit longer to get a perspective. At least it's on the mend before the days out ...

> Fran: ... I try and give you something that we can bring some sense of closure to this, even a little element of it, so that you can go on, and then I reserve the right to kind of deal with the rest of it ...

The couples in this study feel connected, are able to communicate, and resolve conflict. Their relationships are characterized by "loving respectfully, which fosters individual and relationship growth.

*** Loving Respectfully ***

Table 3

Subcategories and Properties in Loving Respectfully

Subcategories:	Respecting	Caring	Feeling Secure
Properties:	Accepting	Caring Behaviors	Being Committed
	Prioritizing	Wanting the Best	Building Security
	Enhancing Relationship	Supporting	
		Meeting Needs	

> Cindy: ... Love each other ... what does that mean ... It means something different to everyone. I guess I think it means concern for the welfare of the other person; their needs and what makes them happy ...
>
> Darren: ... caring, respect and love means you meet each other's needs and show respect.

The emotional connection that builds between couples is characterized by respecting, caring, and feeling secure. When couples respect each other, they accept each other as they are and make each other a priority. Caring about one's spouse motivates one to try to meet the other's needs and support the other during difficult times. Developing a sense of security in the relationship involves being committed to each other. A relationship based on loving respectfully creates synergy, which empowers spouses towards "expanding one's self. The subcategories "respecting", "caring", and "feeling secure" are discussed in the next section.

Respecting

Respect means esteeming, honoring and valuing one's spouse. When spouses respect each other they talk about

one another in ways that reflect their respect and admiration. They describe each other's personality in positive ways. Spouses who respect their partners and who feel respected, value their relationships. Tom reports that he and Amanda have great respect for each other:

> Tom: ... we really think each other is great. I think she's ... about the best thing that could happen to me and she seems to think the same. We have high respect ...
>
> Darren: ... I think what happens is you just respect each other, you become very good friends and you love each other, and I think once you respect each other, really you just adjust ...

Respect involves accepting each other and prioritizing ones' spouse. Respecting each other enhances the relationship.

Accepting

Respect means accepting spouses in their entirety. Acceptance involves a variety of factors. Couples told a number of "growth stories" about how they have been able to accept each other.

Valuing each other as complete human beings with strengths and weaknesses facilitates the process of acceptance. Although each partner may not like everything about his or her spouse, the spouse is accepted. Accepting each other means that couples do not demand that the other change. When couples do not experience subtle or overt demands to change, they can feel free to be themselves:

> Fran: ... I don't ever feel like I have to behave in a certain way to earn (Brian's) favour ... or do my hair the way (he) likes ... a willingness to

> just totally accept each other, and not demand change ... whether it's deliberate overt demands or subtle pressure ... is important ...
>
> Cindy: That people can change some of the things that they do, but they can't change who they are ... Some things you accept ... if you don't love him the way he is forget it ... (it's important to) accept a person in their entirety ... it's not about making them over.

Inevitably couples are different. These differences, however, are accepted and respected. Accepting their differences enables spouses to appreciate and value each other's strengths:

> Fran: ... I'm a fairly detailed person. I like to handle the money part ... (Brian) ... has no interest (in finances), and he's not as detailed as me.

The spouses interviewed accept themselves and can see the humor in their behaviors. When spouses do not feel pressured to behave in certain ways they are able to laugh at their personality quirks and limitations. For example, Barb is able to find humor in her tendency to be very emotional and describes herself as the church crier. Being able to find the humor in behavior facilitates acceptance of annoying habits and personality traits they do not like:

> Amanda: ... he doesn't take his shoes off when he comes home (laugh). He tries to, but he can't walk without shoes ...

Even when Amanda corrected Tom about the name of a particular dance, the interchange was characterized by a lightness of attitude and a non-defensive humorous flow:

> Tom: ... (Amanda) had her break dancing.
>
> Amanda: ... line dancing (chuckle)

Tom: ... line dancing. Whatever.

Amanda: ... there's quite a difference!

Couples told a variety of stories of how they grew to accept each other. Often these stories highlighted the importance of communicating (see subtheme "Communicating" under "Connecting Emotionally"). Cindy describes a very difficult time early in their relationship when she was very hurt that Bob did not stand up to his mother and support her. She reports that Bob talked to her about his feelings and personal struggles in his relationship with his mother. This enabled Cindy to understand and accept that he was unable to stand up to his mother at that time:

> Cindy: I cried myself to sleep every night when (my in-laws) visited because (Bob) would never say anything. Like to support me - he wouldn't say anything ... but I still didn't write the guy off ... And in the larger picture how big a problem is that? ... I mean his mother's attitude bothered him too. It was something we shared. He did share a lot ... of his difficulties (with his mother) ... I felt that I was very much in tune with that ... that's why I was able to say okay so he can't kind of meet her on an adult basis now ... So that's where I'm saying unconditional love comes in, I guess I was willing to accept that ... so I knew, but he loves his mother. If he had been saying to me personally between the two of us my mother's perfect and I want you to like her. That would have been a living hell.

A second factor that enabled Cindy to accept Bob's inability to confront his mother was that she highly valued family and did not want to jeopardize their relationship with Bob's mother. The unconditional acceptance Cindy received from her own mother may have contributed to her ability to give unconditional acceptance. Bob was meeting

other needs of Cindy's' during this time. She felt loved and cared for. This balanced out her frustration with his passivity towards his mother.

Brian reports that he had to struggle with accepting a behavior of Fran's he did not care for. Brian did not like the way Fran interacted with people when she first met them. He felt that Fran came across as cold when meeting people. Fran reports that it takes her a long time to become comfortable with people, trust them and open up. Early in their relationship, Brian would become angry with Fran and pressure her to change. They talked and listened to each other about their experiences. This enabled them to understand each other. Brian could empathize with Fran's distrust of people, which was related to childhood events. In addition, he realized that trying to make Fran change was ineffective:

> Brian: ... learning that she is a complete person, that she has her own speed of changing and developing and that me trying to make her change is something that didn't do much good ... so that's quite a difference that I have to get used to. And knowing that about her makes it easier because I know that ...

Barb describes a different process of accepting David's absence which was required for his job. Early in their marriage, David had a job that required him to spend a great deal of time travelling away from Barb and their children. Barb states that she was able to accept David's absence because she had learned to cope with being alone as a child. Her father travelled, her mother worked, and she spent a lot

of time entertaining herself:

> Barb: I don't know, it never bothered me. I guess ... I was still in that space where I was used to that. When I was growing up as a kid I spent a lot of time alone ... my mom worked, my dad was on the road all the time, and I spent a lot of time entertaining myself.

When spouses respect each other they, make each other a priority.

Prioritizing

Spouses and children are central priorities for the couples interviewed. Spouses maintain a central aspect in each other's lives despite demands of children. Making one's spouse and family a priority may mean making difficult career decisions, but are viewed as growthful experiences.

Making one's spouse a priority is more likely to occur when one consciously makes the decision that spouse and family come first. When spouses value the relationship and each other, they are willing to put their partner first:

> Fran: ... in my mind my commitment is to husband and family first. So if I can prioritize things and have them straight in my mind all the time then that helps as well.

> Don: I make (Debra) a priority. Like, she's more important to me than work, our children ... Maybe just a little less important than me, but not much (laughing).

> Darren: ... you should make the decision who your real friend is. The one you married, is that your friend and, if that person requires your time, you give that person the time ...

> David: So I always say to her if you want to talk to me, please make sure you've got my attention. And I've learned over a period of time that maybe what you're doing is not that important. It all depends if ... it is really important to her, then

what I'm doing is not important ...

The time spouses spend with their children and the sharing of their joys and struggles of parenting is a powerful connector between them. Children are viewed as enhancements to the relationship and couples enjoy the time they spend with their children:

> Fran: ... our home is pretty relaxed and peaceful and we try not to schedule a lot of things in the evenings because we like to be home together, family, that sort of thing.

Making spouse and family a priority may mean having to decline taking on interesting community or church activities or making dramatic career changes. David describes a turning point (see subcategory "Turning Point" under "Expanding One's Self") in his and Barb's relationship when he had to make a career change because the amount of travel was interfering with his family life. He decided that his family was his priority and that he would have to change jobs:

> David: ... I think I really had to make a choice between ... being on the road or being at home and I chose to not travel anymore ... It meant that I had to terminate a good career, and do something else. This ... set me back but I thought it was more important for the family ... cause if I'd continued on I'm sure we wouldn't have stayed together because ... we had two lives, it's pretty hard to have two lives. You can't do that...

Family remained a priority and they were able to maintain their friendship while the kids were growing up. They are now enjoying the spontaneity they did not have when their children were young:

> David: ... and we've fitted times in, but family

> was maybe a higher priority ... we still care for each other but maybe in a different way ... like yesterday, we just took off and went somewhere where normally you wouldn't have done that because of the kids ... but she's still my best friend ...

Enhancing the Relationship

Respect enhances the relationship when it is manifested in behavior and communication. Respectful behavior fosters further respectful behavior.

Couples do not degrade or humiliate their spouse and try to avoid behaviors that anger their spouse (see "Resolving Conflict" under "Connecting Emotionally"). Respect motivates respectful and considerate behaviors. Respectful, considerate behaviors involve considering partner's feelings when making plans and encouraging each other. These behaviors inspire spouses to reciprocate with similar respectful and considerate behaviors. In this manner, interactions between spouses become more and more respectful:

> Amanda: I just think he is (great) period, and he feels the same way about me, so I guess just naturally we behave and talk to each other that way ...

Respectful Communication (as discussed under the subtheme "Communicating" under "Connecting Emotionally) deepens the connection between spouses. When spouses value each other they want to talk and listen. This develops understanding between them. As couples gain a greater understanding and knowledge of each other's inner selves, their respect for each other grows. As couples grow in the marriage, they display more of their strengths and skills.

As they show more of themselves, their spouses respect them more:

> Brian: I think over the years I respect her more as a full human being, as an equal ... I didn't respect her as much intellectually then as I do now ... probably because I know her better now.

Loving respectfully involves a deep sense of caring for each other.

Caring

Caring motivates spouses to communicate and engage in caring behaviors. Supporting and meeting needs are important aspects of caring.

Caring Behaviors

Caring is verbalized and reflected through communication. Couples express their caring. This leaves spouses feeling loved and cared for:

> Cindy: We tell each other we love each other - lots ...

Caring means that spouses are interested in each other and want to understand each other. This motivates them to listen to their spouse's point of view:

> David: ... I think that just the fact of having an interest in each other ... we are interested in the other person ... and really try to see their point of view and what they want to do ... When you have a real interest in a person you're with ... you listen to them more ...

Couples who care are motivated to work through conflict when it arises (see "resolving conflict" under category "Connecting Emotionally). They want to know why their spouse is upset:

> Brian: ... when a situation comes up and she reacts a certain way, then I'd probably want to discuss why she acted that way ... I'd probably start wondering what (she's upset about).

When couples are connected and care, they frequently think about each other. Thoughts are put into action because caring means wanting to please that person. This may involve engaging in caring behaviors like surprise dinners, gifts and spontaneous phone calls. Caring behaviors make spouses feel cared for, which motivates them to reciprocate caring behaviors. This creates a spiral of continuing growth of positive and rewarding interchanges of behavior:

> Debra: ... if they're the most important person in your life ... you think about them all the time and want to do things for (them) ... knowing it's important to them ... gifts, surprise dinners ... the remembrances ...

Behaving in kind and considerate ways can be very fun and enjoyable. This furthers the motivation to continue to behave in considerate behaviors:

> Darren: ... I get scratches ... cause I need to be scratched a lot and that's quite a task ... If I can get my little favor in there and you do little things for each other, that's just enjoyable and lots of fun.

Spouses express their desires and let each other know when they appreciate something their spouse has done. Over time, they get to know each other well and learn what pleases their spouse. Knowing each other well facilitates the ability to engage in caring behaviors because they know their spouses' likes and dislikes:

> Fran: ... You kind of get a sense of what each

> other likes and dislikes and that sort of thing ... I'll bake his favorite cookies ...

Caring is displayed in different ways for couples. Tom highly values the ritual manner in which Amanda greets him at the door. He enjoys her energy and affection, which leaves him feeling loved and cared for:

> Tom: ... and she has the kind of energy about her, she's worked all day too, that she'll greet me at the door, and it's not just a hi hun, and ... this is a ritual ... But she always meets me, always, she will not, not meet me, and give me a hug, a kiss or a peck on the face or whatever ...

For Darren, caring means helping each other. When he sees Debra overwhelmed with trying to take care of the children and home, he relieves some of the pressure by helping her. He is motivated to do this out of his caring for Debra:

> Darren: ... I have no choice but to help her because I can see the burden on her. I mean, I can see the burden ... so I want to help her ...

<u>Wanting the Best</u>

Caring means wanting the best for each other and having spouses' well-being at heart. Wanting the best means encouraging partners to develop themselves and "grow personally" (see category "Expanding One's self"). Spouses encourage each other to take risks because they want them to meet their potential:

> Fran: ... you want them to be everything they can be, and get the most they can out of life, and give the most they can ...

The caring spouses receive contributes to the strength spouses need to change and grow. When people know that

their spouses want the best for them, they trust their spouses' feedback. This helps them keep on a forward moving track:

> Fran:... knowing that you're with somebody who really wants the best for you and really wants to see you reach your potential gives you strength ... And it may rub you the wrong way sometimes ... but through it all you'll come out the better for it ... And there's a person kind of keeping you in check ... and because they want the best for you, you know that it's for your own good. So you don't go off on a tangent or you don't go down the tubes, nobody cares, that sort of thing.

When spouses care about each other they want to support each other during difficult times.

Supporting

Caring about each other feels supportive and spouses gain strength from this support, which contributes to a relationship environment that fosters growth. Couples report having a caring support system.

The spouses in this study state that they want to support their partners. They trust that their partner will support them in any way they can. Knowing that no matter what goes wrong in life their love prevails is experienced as support:

> Cindy: I mean I know that underneath whatever daily ups and downs, struggles with humanity the job has ... I know (Bob) cares and means well and wants the best (for me).
>
> Amanda: It's great knowing that no matter what hurts or what happens, someone really cares about you and you can share it with them ...
>
> Debra: ... I think our caring for each other, and knowing that there's someone else there when all these sorts of miserable things happen, and the

> sadness happens ... life still goes on. There's still love, there's still caring.

Spouses feel supported when they can share their pain with their partners. Spouses draw strength from this support, which is important when spouses risk growing and changing (see "Expaning one's self"):

> Don: ... she's like a big shoulder to lean on, and I can draw some strength from that so ...

Much of the support they experience is developed through talking and listening and sometimes writing. Couples feel supported when they are heard, understood and accepted.

> Elsa: ... he's very understanding. Very supportive ... I've always been able to talk to him about (anything) ... I mean, he knows that I'm very emotional ...

> David: ... and we'll sit and talk about it or go for a walk or, if (Barb's) having a bad day I'll say "Let's go for a walk" and, walk the dog or do something ...

> Debra: And part of that was being able to write to each other too. Like, some days would be just awful days and then at the end of the day we would take 10 minutes to write to each other how today was ... because sometimes one person is still up and the other person is down in the dumps. You know, so to share that kind of a thing ...

> Debra: ... the person who's up listens to the one that's down ... just listening to them ... and not leaving them alone ...

A supportive presence is enhanced with a hug, and other supportive gestures.

> David: ... her concerns are my concerns ... I just recognize that she has it and I'm there if she needs me ... She knows that I'm there and that I care. I let her know as many ways as I can ...

> Debra: ... if one's really down the other one will

> come, give you a hug, and say "I'm sorry that you're so upset and, I wish there was something I could do but I can't ... I can't change this"

Support may also involve helping one's partner out by taking over chores and child care. This takes some of the stress off when one member of the couple is having a particularly difficult time. Spouses appreciate the support they receive and express their gratitude:

> Elsa: ... when he helps me out, I say thank you so much ... but he knows that I'm grateful, that I'm appreciative ...
>
> I: How does he know that, that you appreciate him?
>
> Elsa: Pinch his bum!

When Barb's mother was ill, it was very important for her to know that David was taking care of the kids at home and that she could call and talk with him:

> Barb: ... when my mother was ill and I went out there and (David) stayed with the kids ... I could phone home and say this is what's happening and this is what she did today ... To know there was somebody at the home base that could do that for me, that was really important ...

Couples report that people outside of the relationship can also be an important source of support. Couples emphasized the importance of having the support of a loving and caring extended family. At least one spouse in each couple reported a supportive family. Elsa and Darren received a lot of support from Darren's family in building their business:

> Elsa: ... like (Darren's') Mom and Dad are very supportive, my father-in-law takes care of the children, so they don't have to go to day home or daycare, and (Darren's') Mom is our dispatcher.

Cindy and Bob had difficulties dealing with the separation of their son from his wife. Although they shared their pain with each other, they felt that they needed outside support and, therefore, went for professional help.

> Cindy: ... it's like your own daughter refused to talk to you. So we were hurt ... we were sad about the marriage break up ...
>
> Bob: Well we talked an awful lot about it.
>
> Cindy: And decided that we probably needed some objectivity ... (Bob) was in so much more hurt ... his hurt was probably harder for him to deal with ... I couldn't deal with his hurt which is partly why we went for counselling. I felt he needed more help than I was able to give him ... It was a jointly observed need I guess ...

Debra and Don found that their faith and Marriage Encounter group helped them through Don's unemployment.

> Don: ... I think our faith ... carried us through. she's very faithful so it's like a big shoulder to lean on, and I can draw some strength from that. And we were still involved in Marriage Encounter, and the couples there ... they gave you some support too.

When spouses care about each other they want to meet their partners' needs.

Meeting Needs

Caring motivates couples to meet each other's needs. This involves communicating about their needs. Couples describe a number of different needs that are met in their relationships.

The couples in this study are committed to helping each other meet their needs:

> Darren: ... So it's just a matter of understanding that you ... each have to achieve, and help

> achieve each other's goals ... you make a commitment to each other ...

Spouses have a variety of needs that they help each other meet. Meeting needs may involve doing little things for each other that make them feel comfortable; listening to one another; or helping a spouse achieve goals:

> Fran: ... they do stuff for you, they do things to make you feel comfortable, get you talking ... and not feeling that you have to meet all their needs, but that you are free to ... be able to be there for certain things ...

Communication is a central aspect of meeting needs. Talking and listening enables spouses to understand each others' needs. When spouses understand their partners' needs they are able to help them meet these needs. Spouses let each other know what their needs are and how their spouse can help them meet them. They let each other know when they have met a need or done something they appreciate. When spouses know that a behavior is appreciated they engage in it because they care and want to please their partner, which results in growth of these behaviors and the rewarding experience of the relationship:

> Brian: ... she's quite vocal. When you do something she likes she lets you know ... well then I know ...

Meeting a spouse's need may require some sacrifice, which spouses are willing to do because they <u>care</u> for their partners. Elsa was willing to make a number of sacrifices necessary for Darren to start his own business, which enabled Darren and Elsa to grow as they took on a very difficult endeavor. Because Elsa knew Darren well, she

understood his need to be his own boss. Wanting the best for Darren motivated her to sacrifice the house they had worked hard to buy and the stability of a regular job, and to risk the uncertainty of starting a new business:

> Elsa: ... I knew that (Darren) always wanted to go into business ...
>
> Darren: ... I can remember that night we were sitting and talking about this. I was very frustrated, I was building everybody else's business and I was sick and tired ... So we went through this discussion and she says "well, we'll just sell the house". Well she always wanted a house, so I thought I wasn't gonna bring that up as an issue, and then she says sell the house. And I thought, oh man! ...

It is necessary that both members of the couple feel that their needs are met or the desire to meet each other's needs may not prevail. When spouses' needs are met, they are more willing to meet the needs of their partner. Couples trust that their needs will eventually be met or at least that things will even out in the long run. If a spouse is not feeling their needs are met, they will be reluctant to make sacrifices, compromise or defer their own need for a spouse. Barb and Cindy explain the importance of reciprocity:

> Barb: (David) is a very good listener ... and I have a lot of talking to do (laughs). I need someone to listen to me ... and he's the kind of person you can talk to about things. Like if you see something that has bothered you or if you have a bad day and come home, you know that you can lay it all on him. He just sort of absorbs it like a chameleon ... He reads the paper and watches TV too, he needs to do that. I recognize that ... so it doesn't become a source of anger ... I think it just becomes a source of small frustrations. But it never leads to anything big because I don't

> think it's an ongoing thing. Like if he never ever talked to me ever, then yes, it could become a source of anger for me.
>
> Cindy: ... their needs and what makes them happy are important, but you also have to realize that your own needs have to be met along the way or you can't sustain it.

Couples, in marriages characterized by growth, have needs that are met outside of the relationship. Accepting each other means that couples must acknowledge that not all of their needs can be met by each other. Acknowledging these limitations means that spouses do not demand that their partner meet a need that they are incapable of meeting. Spouses, therefore, are free to pursue activities outside of the relationship that meet needs which cannot be met within the marriage. Spouses support their partner's pursuit of these needs:

> Fran: ... I realized, probably a couple of years ago, he was not capable of meeting every single one of my needs, and that was okay ... I'm not trying to change his person, like, make him more this type of person or something ... if I need that sort of exchange then I seek out other supportive relationships ... he is not capable of meeting every single one of my needs ... and that's okay. That doesn't mean the relationship was any less or anything, but there were other avenues ... and I felt that was very freeing.

The planning of activities, separate from one's spouse, is done in a respectful way and involves considering the other person's feelings. Knowing each other well facilitates this because spouses know what many of their partner's needs are and take them into consideration. This may involve knowing that a spouse needs a lot of notice when making plans or giving a spouse some space when that person

is upset. Partners have learned to be sensitive to their spouses needs:

> Fran: ... learning what works with that person, ... He has learned to give me as much notice as possible if plans are changed ...
>
> David: ... it's amazing sometimes that we really know what the other person wants, and can sense that ... I know when she's having a bad day so I give her more room and I listen ...

Darren tried to schedule his running so that it did not take away from family time, but was not always able to. Elsa has been supportive of his hobby:

> Darren: ... I'd run at noon hour so it didn't affect our time ... But you've been supportive (of it when it did affect our time) ...

Meeting needs outside of the marriage through friendships can enhance the relationship. Friends can help put relationship difficulties into perspective, and spouses bring back to the marriage the enriching experiences they have with friends:

> Fran: I would say I view our relationship in terms of needs as probably the primary source of fulfillment ... But I also view these little satellite relationships that we each have as ... enriching the central relationship ... We bring things back into the relationship that enrich the relationship.
>
> Cindy: I think our friendships have been an important part of our marriage, because I think if you live in isolation with your own marriage problems they can become out of balance. So I would say friendships are an important part of sustaining life together. It's something you share but it's larger than your own little hole that you dig into ... Life isn't just you in isolation ... it makes the quality of our life better when we have these interactions with other people ...

Couples describe different ways that their needs are met. For Amanda it was important that Tom be affectionate with her. Amanda did not feel her mother was able to give her the affection she needed and her father, who was affectionate, died when Amanda was very young. Tom has met Amanda's need for affection:

> Amanda: ... (my mother) didn't know how to show affection or give affection to us or dad, she just didn't know how, she couldn't do it, and that I found hard growing up because I never felt like I got what I needed ... Mr. A is like my father in the way he shows affection.

Darren reports that he works a lot and has been described as a workaholic. He feels that Elsa understands and accepts his need to work hard and achieve:

> Darren: Some of the people I worked with say I'm a workaholic, and I think you understand that to a certain extent ...
>
> Elsa: Yeah, I know that he has to. It's just something that he has to do. ...

The process of meeting needs varies between couples. Amanda and Tom describe a misunderstanding that had the potential to become a tremendous source of conflict and could have been very damaging to the relationship. Instead they were able to talk about their different perspectives and come to a resolution. With Tom's persistence they talked about Amanda's upset:

> Amanda: ... so when my first birthday came, and he didn't do anything I was just devastated, and so we realized that it was simply that we had different ideas of what was important ... so I would write in his appointment book a week ahead of time so he would remember ... So he would remember and I was happy and he was ... but it

didn't happen right away, it took a little while.

Fran reports that she was not always vocal about her needs, but has become more confident in expressing her needs over time:

> Fran: the beginnings of a relationship, you're somewhat insecure so, you wanna try and do what the other guy wants ... and over time you learn to express your needs more ...

Cindy trusted that Bob's concern for her would enable him to understand her need to be with her ailing mother. Bob found it hard to be without Cindy, but was able to cope:

> Cindy: ... you've got to do it and you've got to ask the other person ... just love me enough to let me do it. I really had to do it ... I had to just trust that our concern for each other was big enough and somehow that was going to accommodate us. And he did ...

Respecing and caring contributes to a sense of security in the relationship for spouses.

Feeling Secure

Being committed is a crucial factor in developing a sense of security in the relationship. A variety of factors are involved in building security.

Being Committed

Commitment in marriages, characterized by individual and relationship growth, increases over time. Many couples report having committed parental role models while others report a desire to be different from their parents.

The couples, in this study, report that they entered their marriages with a life-long commitment to the relationship:

> David: I think it was that we wanted it to be a lifetime of having somebody for the rest of our lives. And I think that was the key for us. Whether we succeeded or failed, that was another thing but, I think that's what we were intending.

Commitment is based on respect, care, and a genuine desire to be together. The commitment is not only to staying in the marriage, but to the spouse as a person. This means being committed in every way possible:

> Fran: I'd say be committed to the relationship. That may sound very simplistic, but I would say be committed, heart, mind, soul and body to the relationship.

When couples care about each other, they are committed to working through differences and not giving up on the relationship when things are not going well. They do not have regrets about their marital choice and want to learn life's difficult lessons with their spouses. Couples report that a different spouse would only mean more difficult times with someone whom they do not care about or respect as much:

> Amanda: ... and if you had differences you worked through them, you don't just throw in the towel, but that was the idea ... you work on it ...

> Fran: ... despite the rough times ... which are few and far between, or that could come ... I still would like to be here doing it with him, than have to learn maybe with harder knocks outside ...

A positive spiral of growth is created as commitment is displayed in words and behavior. The more conflicts, differences, and crises couples work through the more confident they are that they can work through future struggles. Trust in each other's commitment to the relationship grows as couples display their willingness to

talk, listen and resolve_conflict:

> Fran: ... we are committed to making it work ... I think that it's believable by both of us in word and deed ... The longer you're together and you maintain the relationship the more history there is to build on. So there's less worry ...

Some couples describe parents who went through good and bad times together, but remained good friends. Their parents modelled affection, respect, and caring. They learned from parents that difficulties can be worked through:

> Debra: ... here's two couples that have been married well into their 45th year ... and they've had good times, bad times and sorrows. They have stuck it out and have always been good friends with each other ... partners and, certainly committed to each other. And I think that commitment shows you that you can do it. You may have rough spots but you work over them and carry on ... It wasn't unusual for Dad to waltz Mom around the table or give her a kiss when he came in or something like that.

Spouses who did not have parents that modelled love and support were often determined to do something different from their parents. This means having a commitment to not repeat the past:

> Fran: ... it's the commitment to just not letting history repeat itself, deliberately setting out day to day ... to bring changes ... And to make it better than it is ... that's another thing we verbalize; ... that our relationship is going to become closer and better over time. We're committed to doing what's possible to make it grow that way ... rather than just going through life with blinders on ...

Even people who had parents with positive marriages report a desire to do some things differently from their parents':

> Debra: ... when my parents got upset, rather than talking about it, one just storms off in one direction, one storms off in the other and, after about four days they'll decide that maybe they'll talk ... They'll talk to each other but they won't talk about what bothered them in the first place, whereas we don't do that.

A number of variables further the development of feeling secure.

Building Security

A sense of security is developed when couples trust each other, feel accepted, and grow together. A sense of security provides the strong foundation from which couples expand themselves.

Couples trust that spouses will always be there and be supportive, which builds a sense of security. They trust the fidelity of spouses and themselves:

> Barb: ... all these friends around me are saying "oh well, he's found another woman" and I'm just thinking, I don't expect that to happen in my marriage, which could be naive on my part (laugh) ... but I guess there's a security there that I just would never expect (David) to do that, and I would never expect myself to do something like that.

Accepting each other builds a sense of security. Couples know that no matter what they say or do their spouse accepts them. They may not like everything about each other, but they know they are unconditionally loved. This leaves them feeling very secure:

> Fran: I know that whatever I would say or do, he would still love and accept me. It doesn't mean he would like what he saw or might need some time or something, but I feel there's nothing that I could say or do that would change his feelings for me. So again, I think that's security in itself.

Feeling secure in the relationship enables spouses to encourage each other to pursue interests outside of the marriage:

> Fran: ... feeling very confident in our relationship and non-threatened if we go out ... Both of us have been somewhat pursuant of more relationships. Like we want to expand our world somewhat in terms of social relationships ...

When spouses discover that the marriage survives and improves with personal growth, they develop confidence in the relationship. They trust that they can continue to change and develop themselves without harming the relationship:

> Fran: ... we went through a maturing process and we were still able to make the relationship ... richer or something like that ... rather than drifting apart. So that ... gives you quite a bit of confidence ...

Feeling respected and cared for builds a sense of security which creates synergy that empowers spouses to grow. Spouses push each other towards growth because they want the best for each other. The sense of security spouses experience within the marriage creates a secure base from which they can expand themselves:

> Debra: ... with (Don) as my supporter trying new things is easier ... He's my sounding board ...

Loving respectfully creates a relationship that empowers spouses and fosters growth. The processes involved in personal growth are discussed under the category "Expanding one's "self.

*** Expanding One's Self ***

Table 4

Subcategories and Properties in Expanding One's Self

Subcategory:	Developing Self-Confidence	Turning Points	Growing from Differences
Properties:	Persisting	Persisting	
	Encouraging	Encouraging	
	Expanding Opportunities		

It is within these loving relationships, which are characterized by respect, care, and security, that couples can risk changing and personally growing:

> Fran: ... I'm committed to a process of changing and growing and ... I can't think of a better place to get it ... you can fail and they'll pick you up or you can do well and they'll be there clapping for you.

Personal growth involves "Developing Self-Confidence", "Turning Points", and "Growing from Differences". These subcategories are described in this section.

Developing Self-Confidence

Loving respectfully fosters self-esteem and engaging in expanding opportunities facilitates the development of self-confidence.

Respecing, caring and feeling secure creates a relationship environment that builds self-esteem. Positive feelings toward spouses are communicated verbally and non-verbally (see subcategory "Communication" under "Connecting Emotionally). These positive feelings are internalized and make partners feel better about themselves. Tom describes a family ritual that enhanced his self-esteem. This ritual communicated verbal and non-verbal messages:

> Tom: ... that was a special time when Daddy, the big lord, came home, and I think that was good for the kids that we all had this one time, everyday, that we were together and talked ... But the message, and I never thought of that until just a few years ago reflecting on it was that in a way by putting me on a pedestal, where I was important in the family, was sending me a very good message too ...

Loving respectfully leads to continual development of self-confidence through respect and acceptance. Spouses report that feeling accepted fosters self-confidence. Knowing that one's spouse is proud and interested in every part of one's life makes one feel important and valuable:

> Debra: I'm now a lot more secure, a lot happier with who I am as a person.
>
> Interviewer: So how do you think that's come about? ...
>
> Debra: ... I think by (Don's) acceptance of me, and ... he's proud of me ... He cares about what happens to me. He's interested in every aspect of my life ...

Loving respectfully means making one's spouse a priority, and having a spouse's best interest at heart may mean sacrificing one's own desires at times. A number of the spouses report that it foster's personal growth when they make their partner a priority because they learn to be less selfish:

> Don: Well I've personally grown ... I know my priorities have changed ... from when I was first married ... Now my priority is (Debra), and her well-being.
>
> Bob: I have to learn also to give. I think being the baby of the family I always tended to get my own way ... and that's one of the problems. So I have to grow up (laughs) ... And I think I've learned to really put somebody else ahead of myself, which is hard.

Spouses respond to their partners' belief in them by engaging in respectful and encouraging behaviors. This is a reciprocal process in which partners continually inspire each other to engage in more positive and growth-promoting ways:

> Tom: ... when you do things for your spouse that tells them they are important and special ... they have to behave better, and I expect that in some other ways I've done the same for her...

Persisting and Encouraging

Many of the couples report that persistent encouragement from spouses led to the development of their self-confidence. When spouses respect their partners, they believe in them. This motivates their persistent encouragement.

Amanda reports that Tom's faith in her and encouragement to expand herself fostered her self-esteem. He persistently told her that she was worthwhile and she gradually came to believe in herself:

> Amanda: ... I was a shy insecure, individual, I tell that to my kids and they don't believe me (laughs) ... but to someone who has much more belief in my abilities. .. Quite a switch ...
>
> Interviewer: any sense of how you made that transition?
>
> Amanda: ... partly his faith in me ... He kept telling me that I was worthwhile, and eventually I thought it must be so. But I started with very little confidence ... he was encouraging .... Its hard not to live up to it when someone keeps telling you about that.

Elsa found making decisions very difficult for much of her life. She feels her confidence has grown, and that she

has learned to trust herself to make decisions. Darren contributed to this growth by encouraging Elsa to make decisions. He let her know that he would support her whatever decision she made:

> Darren: ... and I said "I'll support you in whatever you do, whatever decision, just make the decision" ...

Expanding Opportunities

Many of the spouses report that they began to feel better about themselves as they developed the confidence to take on new challenges. Believing in themselves gave them the courage to engage in expanding opportunities.

Loving respectfully builds a sense of security from which spouses engage in growth expanding opportunities. As discussed under the subcategory feeling secure, spouses trust that their spouse will accept them no matter what. This creates a sense of security. It is from this secure foundation that spouses have the courage to embark on new endeavors. Through these new experiences and challenges, they build a sense of confidence within themselves. They learn that they are skilled and capable of successes:

> Barb: ... I guess maybe realizing that I was more capable than I thought I was. And I've picked up a lot of skills over the last 20 years, just because of the different things I've been involved in, either in the church or the nature of my job ... I guess I've discovered that I can do things quite well ...

As couples continue to expand themselves, and their spouses continue to love them, a spiral of on-going growth occurs:

> Brian: She accepts me ... there's a track record - that no matter what she will love me so it doesn't matter ... It gives me a sense of security ... to expand myself ...

Cindy reports that David's schooling provided an opportunity for her to expand herself. He completed his masters degree while they were married. Cindy felt good that she was able to rise to the challenge and creatively deal with the difficult situation of taking care of young children with very little money. She felt enriched by the interactions with people from other cultures whom they encountered while living in student housing outside of Canada:

> Cindy: So I felt very productive or creative, I think even though it wasn't very easy. And I also think that I did something that modern women wouldn't have ... It was a very enriched life ... and because of his studies I've had experiences ... of two worlds that I otherwise would not have experienced ... Though it wasn't a formal education it was an interesting life ... that probably led to our international interests in overseas ... in his retirement ... I'm sure I did grow in basic maturity and self-confidence ...

Cindy's only regret was that she has never furthered her own education, but she feels that she was not motivated to do so; her other interests were productive ones. Cindy has grown by teaching English as a second language and being involved in numerous charitable activities. Cindy and Bob have continued their stimulating life into retirement with volunteer work in third world countries. This has offered them numerous challenges.

Cindy and Bob also report that they have grown by

having to be flexible and change with society. They married at a time when traditional roles between the sexes were well defined. They report that they have learned to be less rigid about meeting traditional ideals about roles:

> Cindy: ... I think that we are an example of people who've come through a changed society, with male/female roles. And I think we've changed and grown with that ... men have to see that it's okay to get the vacuum cleaner out once in a while ... that sort of thing. And (Bob) does that ... I mean I think that 41 years is a very long time. It's a lot of living, a lot of changes. Society changes, family changes, we have babies, we have to grow up, now we have grandchildren ... we're getting older ...

Turning points offer the opportunity for expanding one's self.

Turning Points

Couples experience turning points as opportunities for growth. Turning points include deciding to go back to school, starting a business, and becoming parents.

Encouragement and Persistence

Encouragement and persistent pushes from partners, moves spouses in the direction of growth. Spouses encourage partners' to grow because they see their capabilities and believe in them. When spouses care and want the best for each other, they support each other's growth. Spouses who feel secure in their relationships feel safe enough to risk pushing their partners towards growth even if they annoy their partners in the process. It is within these relationships based on loving respectfully that couples feel safe to push each other to risk changing and growing.

Couples describe various turning points in their lives. Many of the individuals interviewed had returned to school at some point in their marriage. Barb felt she needed to develop herself more, which motivated her to go back to school:

> Barb: ... I feel a sense of growth from the time I married to now ... In a marriage ... a lot of what you are is part of that other person and so it's nice sometimes if you can develop your own personality ... my own personal self ... Sort of finding out who I am and what I'm like and what my interests are aside from being with (David) and I guess that's important for me to be able to do, and still maintain a relationship at the same time ... I hadn't finished high school and so there was kind of a gap there and I went on to do music and stuff ... And so I've had a chance to grow that way but I've also, I think grown as a person ...

David facilitated Barb's personal growth and return to school by encouraging her. When Barb expressed self doubts David persistently affirmed her and expressed his belief in her:

> David: ... and I think (Barb) had the ability to do things ... She had a chance to go to university and get a degree and she was sort of like "I can't" ... (and she) ... just needed that little push of saying "yeah, you can do it". I think she felt a little insecure because she only had grade 10 and I had to say well, "come on, you can do it" ... I tried to push her into seeing that she could do it, because she can ... and that was quite something for her to go back and do it ... I think that I pushed her and I encouraged her and everything...

Barb had been a full-time homemaker until she returned to school. She and David had traditional roles within the family. When Barb's school demands increased David took over responsibilities that he had not engaged in previously.

He expanded himself by taking on household tasks and developing non-traditional behaviors:

> David: ... there was a lot of things that I assumed and I think I haven't given them back ... I bought groceries ... did the washing and certain things.

David was aware that there was a risk that Barb could grow away from him. Respectful loving, however, means wanting the best for a spouse and David felt that she would benefit by the change:

> David: ... at the same time you know that's a risk you take; that somebody might grow too much, but that's part of life, you take those gambles. But I also knew that's what she wanted to do ... I recognized it was something that she had to do.

Darren reports that it was the support from Elsa which enabled him to risk starting his own business. She had faith in his abilities and encouraged him. Elsa reassured him when he questioned his abilities. This boosted his confidence and gave him the strength to build his business. In addition, Elsa was willing to support him by working for the company:

> Darren: ... it's that support ... a hundred percent ... and it makes it so much easier ... If you don't have support of your spouse ... I don't know how you succeed ... I remember the first day I started ... cause it was kind of depressing at first. (Elsa) said, "oh, no, you'll do it, you'll do it " ... and she said "if you need any kind of help I'll answer the phones for you" ... which was very warming because you know you're gonna succeed because you have people behind you that believe in you and it really makes it ...

Elsa was willing to make the necessary sacrifices and do some driving for the business because she wanted to help

Darren achieve his goals. They adjusted to working together by setting some ground rules:

> Darren: ... we don't even talk to each other during the day. We made a rule that ... we would not do too much sweet talk and ... when we come home we'd have the discussion ...

These ground rules have enabled them to focus on fighting the competition rather than each other.

Fran began a process of personal growth when they moved to a new city and away from her support system. She did not want to move, but was agreeable because she saw it as an excellent opportunity for Brian and wanted the best for him. She also felt it would be good for her own personal development:

> Fran: ... I kind of knew deep down it was probably the best medicine but it was like bitter medicine. I didn't want to take it ... I felt very isolated, again, being physically removed from a familiar setting and family to a place where I had no family ... But I saw how he felt about it. And I wanted the best for him and I could see that this was just beyond his wildest dreams ... It was at that time that I really started to look at my situation and think I would like to embark on some deliberate process of evaluation and begin a process of change ...

The period after the move was very difficult for Fran, who was still learning to express her feelings to Brian. Her confidence in their relationship helped her to cope:

> Fran: ... I felt all these things but didn't even know why they were there or where they were coming from, or if I was allowed to feel this way or anything like that ... and I certainly did not want to impede (his) pursuit ... I just kind of swallowed it and thought we'll ... get through it ...

Since the move Fran, has engaged in a number of

activities which foster her personal growth. She works part-time, does volunteer work, and is working towards a degree at the University. Brian has encouraged and supported Fran in her pursuit of these activities. Brian verbalized his support, they talked about the finances involved in her return to school, and he helped to take care of the home:

> Fran: He would say I 100% support what you are doing. Financially we came to some kind of agreement with that ... he was more than willing to take care of the home, that sort of thing ...

When Fran felt pressured to help more at church and wondered if she should sacrifice her schooling, Brian kept her on track. He encouraged Fran to continue working on her University degree. Brian verbalized his support and voiced his belief that he felt it would be a mistake to give up school:

> Fran: ... I had one hundred percent support ... I was feeling pressure to get involved in something else in church and I had kind of thought that ... maybe this is what I should be doing and shelve this school business. And he said "No" ... he said "I don't think that would be a good move for you" ... and that's happened more than once ...

Brian saw the positive impact school had on Fran. He saw her energized by school, and because he cares and wants the best for Fran, he persistently and strongly encouraged her to continue:

> Brian: ... she thrived on it. It gave her energy. Even though she had to do a lot of homework and studying ... the net of it all was a big positive thing for her. She felt good about herself, she was excited about it ...

Brian was able to support Fran's schooling because he felt secure enough in the relationship not to feel threatened by her changing. He continued to feel that he was a priority in her life, which made making sacrifices easier.

Parenting

Becoming a parent presents an opportunity for growth. It involves learning to put someone else ahead of oneself, and dealing with less attention from one's spouse. Darren reports that the acceptance and support from Elsa helped him through the difficult change process of becoming a parent. After being married for ten years without children, Darren struggled with the adjustment of the birth of his daughter and the loss of the individual attention from Elsa:

> Darren: ... there's just little things that you do together and all of a sudden bam, it's gone ... I was the baby ... I was the one that was getting the attention, ... then I realized that I had some growing up to do so ... Someone had taken my time that I had acquired over all these years and I was probably jealous to a certain extent ... I let her know ... I'm not one to hide my feelings ...

Elsa understood Darren's struggle because she knew him well. She did not take his anger personally and she accepted the manner in which Darren expressed his feelings:

> Elsa: ... so he had to all of a sudden vacuum Well I'd hear about it ... He was very vocal ... but just knowing the way (Darren) says things or really vents things ... that's just part of his nature. You take him for who he is ...

Darren knew he had to change and learn to put his daughter's needs ahead of his own at times:

> Darren: ... it's just that I began to realize that there was another person and we're not getting rid of her. She's here to stay and I ... loved her right from the time I held her ...

Brian and Fran report that having children facilitated the process of growth both as individuals and as a couple. Fran was scared to have children, fearing that it could harm her relationship with Brian:

> Fran: ... I'd say having kids was probably another major turning point ... I was afraid to have children ... knowing that ... having children can drive a wedge in a relationship or bring it closer together ... I'd say they definitely brought us together, given ... more cords to bond or something like that. Something we're both committed to. I mean, we feel very similar in ways of raising them and what we want, things like that ...
>
> Brian: yeah. Kids have a way of rounding you out. You figure, you're selfish you know, I don't want to be selfish ...

Having children has motivated Brian and Fran to stretch themselves. They report that displaying affection publicly does not come naturally to them, but that they have tried to model affectionate behavior for their children:

> Brian: ... I would say by nature we're probably not (affectionate), but we sort of make a point of it ... to hug and kiss, especially when the kids are around. It's not contrived but we remind ourselves we should, we want to model that ... we're close and it's not just something that happens in private.
>
> Fran: ... my parents were demonstrative when they were drinking and not very demonstrative most of the other time and also in a situation where there was physical abuse present. It made me not feel very comfortable with physical contact ... so it's been something that I've been committed to becoming more comfortable with ...

Fran and Brian had to push themselves to change this

behavior and are glad that they have stretched themselves. Fran reports that it is easier to risk changing with Brian because of the quality of their relationship:

> Fran: ... I can't imagine practicing on anybody else but him because I trust him. I don't trust very many people, but ... it's easy to work it out with him in this relationship ...

Dealing with differences between spouses can lead to expanding one's self.

Growing From Differences

Differences between spouses provide excellent opportunities for **expanding one's self**. Expansion is facilitated by acceptance, give and take, persistence, feedback, and listening.

Couples can maintain their different personality styles while becoming more balanced and similar to their partners. Expanding one's personality and developing different ways of interacting is a gradual process. Respect and acceptance are important in this process. When spouses are not pressured to change resistance is not created and spouses gradually incorporate different personality traits of their partner:

> Tom: ... we've changed somewhat, but I'm far more in need of order and think more linearly and need to be more orderly and neat. She's far more creative and flexible. You would think that would normally be an irksome thing, that we would be distracted by that, but I think that we like each other enough that we accepted that ... And the irony of it is that without ever thinking about it ... we realized that we had both moved toward being more like the other.

Talking and listening to each other's needs and

understanding them facilitates change. Because couples communicate, they know each other well. Their acceptance of each other means that they take their partner's personality style into consideration. When spouses feel respected and accepted, they are more open to change. Accommodating each other's needs means that they have to stretch themselves. This leads to growth and the discovery of the benefits of alternative ways of being:

> Fran: ... I'm learning that spontaneity can be really fun ... and now I'll say, "okay, let's try it" ... and part of that is ... learning what works with the other person ... he has learned to give me as much notice as possible if plans are changed, and I'm learning to accept the spontaneity and not get all in a big flap about it ... so there's a definite sense of give and take.

Persistence also facilitates growing from differences. Persistence means encouraging each other to do something different. When spouses' persistence comes from a place of respect and caring, partners are more inclined to respond positively. They push each other to try new activities that they might not otherwise try. In this manner, they foster growth in each other

> David: ... we've learned from each other. There's a lot of times maybe I didn't want to do something and ... (she) stuck with it and got me to do it and it worked out, and it was good for me. And I think that 's where we fed off each other ...

Change is not always welcome or easy. Willingness to be flexible is an important part of growing from differences:

> Debra: ... you can't just stay in this little box and "everything that I do I do it my way and my

> ideas are right. "I go 100% my way all the time". Once in a while you have to stop and take a look and "well, Okay, maybe I could step sideways", and veer off a little differently than I had originally planned.
>
> Elsa: ... We're flexible, I think you have to be flexible ... because things do change ...

The couples interviewed recognize, however, that despite the turbulence of change they can benefit from doing something different. Don and Debra discuss the benefits of growing from differences:

> Don: ... and change sometimes for me isn't stability. You know, it may be good, but I don't recognize it as being good ... and I have to learn to bend a little bit to be a little bit more open to change ... Whether I like it or not ... we're both pushing each other ...
>
> Debra: ... I think that's what adds creativity ... it adds... growth ... by making you expand ... (Don) is more adventurous ... and says, "Let's go try this" and "Let's go do that" ... spur of the moment ...

Relationships that are based on respecting, caring and feeling secure involve giving each other feedback about their behavior. When spouses care for each other, they let their spouses know when they see them engaging in behaviors that they view as negative or interfering with their growth. Although change is not easy, spouses are receptive to this feedback because they respect their spouses. They know that the feedback is given because their spouses care about them. Fran has been able to hear Brian's view point about how she presents as cold to new acquaintances:

> Fran ... and over the years I've kinda learned to change in that area because I could see from his perspective ... But those habits that I had were quite ingrained. So they're very difficult to

> change overnight ... so it was a bit of an internal struggle ...

Darren knows that he can be aggressive. He appreciates and trusts the feedback from Elsa when she sees him coming on too strong.

> Darren: So she says back off ... because she's a very kind person. Much more low key than I am and I take her word for it ... I know I'm very high key ... very focused and very aggressive and I can cut people down ...

In contrast to growing from differences, sharing interests can also lead to growth. Several of the couples report that sharing spirituality fostered growth in the spiritual realm:

> Don: ... being involved in the church together is the most important thing of keeping religion going. Religion can be very individualized ... one person may feel a lot stronger than another person, but when you do things together at the same time then you can share a lot more ... I think our religion started to grow and our faith started to grow ... we could talk about church and that's something we (hadn't) really discussed.

> Barb: I think doing Tai Chi ... has taken us to another level of spirituality, and I think it's something that we can share together. Which is really nice at this stage of life, because sometimes in a relationship one person will reach that plateau and the other won't, and that makes it all tough but, but we're sort of both in about the same mindset right now ....

An on-going spiral of growth is created as couples continue to change. When spouses care about their partners, they want to share their positive experiences so that they can also benefit. When spouses share their new learnings with each other they incite growth in each other:

> Fran: I'm feeling pretty good about things and I want that to rub off on him or something like that

... I want to share this good experience with him ...

Expanding one's self revitalizes relationships. When spouses are empowered to grow and change, and share these aspects of themselves with their partner, the attraction between them increases. This process leads to very rewarding relationships, which are described under the category "Experiencing Empowering Connections".

*** Experiencing Empowering Connections ***

Table 5

Subcategories and Properties in Experiencing Empowering Connections

Subcategory	Feeling Energized	Deepening the Connection	Feeling Romantic	Expecting Growth
Context	Enhancing Relationship	Wanting to be Together		

Fran: ... when you enrich yourself you enrich the relationship.

Experiencing empowering connections includes the following: "Feeling energized", "Deepening the Connection", "Feeling Romantic", and "Expecting Future Growth".

Feeling Energized

Individual and relationship growth create energy in the relationship. When spouses develop themselves the attraction increases between them and the relationship is experienced as energizing.

Enhancing Relationship

When couples strive towards enhancing themselves, they bring back their enriched selves to the marital relationship. They have stimulating and fun experiences to

share with each other. When spouses expand themselves, they become more interesting people. This enhances the relationship:

> Barb: ... I think back to when we were first married. If I was still at that level ... I'm not sure we'd still be married. I hadn't discovered anything about myself ... I would have been very limited and uninteresting. I don't know if he'd want to stay with someone who remained the same ... I wouldn't have ...
>
> Cindy: We kind of lead a stimulating life that probably expands who we are and what you have to relate to each other about ... It's been mind boggling.

When spouses expand themselves and develop their abilities and personalities the attraction between them increases. This occurs as couples talk and listen to each other about what they have experienced, learned and discovered. The relationship is continually re-energized when spouses share with each other their exciting and expanding experiences:

> Brian: ... and it is enriching for me because (Fran) reads all the books ... and shares what she reads with me ...

Spouses report a physical and emotional attraction, and feeling energized by their spouse:

> Tom: ... when we got married and I was standing at the front of the church and the right music came and I turned around and when I saw her, my heart jumped about three yards with excitement, and the crazy thing is it's still there ... I'm not saying my heart leaps now like it did in the church when we got married, but it's similar! It's not gone away, and while I thought she was the prettiest person in the world then, I know now that she's even prettier now than she was then ... It's not just a prettiness of the face, but a prettiness of the being of something more than the surface ...

> ... and so there's an excitement in the relationship, not just a nice comfortable feeling, there's that, but there's more, and there's an energy that I get from her ... I get revitalized and I have no explanation why or understanding of how or why ... but I feel recharged, re-energized when we interact ...
>
> Fran: ... I feel differently when I'm physically in his presence than when I'm not there ... or when I think about him during the day I have certain feelings that I still describe as chemistry or something like that. Or when I get to talk about him sometimes to other people ... it's not the same as a young teenager feeling because it's matured, I think ... it's deeper, it's better.

After the interviews I recorded my own reactions:

> Interviewer: I felt inspired after sitting with these couples. I felt energized by them and motivated to continue sorting through the many differences between my husband and myself. Such relationships are truly something to strive for!

Spouses who experience empowering connections are motivated to continually deepen the connection.

Deepening the Connection

The connection deepens with time and shared experiences. Couples who are deeply connected find their spouses' presence comforting and warm. Finding the words to describe how it feels to be in a marriage characterized by growth can be difficult.

Both partners have grown in many ways and they have shared experiences. Shared experiences fosters a close connection between spouses. They have supported each other through good and bad times. Spouses become very in tune with each other after having shared many experiences together. Being able to openly talk and share their lives builds a

deep friendship:

> Cindy: ... now there's a sense of friendship of deep, deep ... friendship ... and I suppose that word has taken on a different dimension for me ... that would be very heavily loaded rich...

When couples know each other well they feel comfortable together. This comfort grows over time as spouses communicate openly and they get to know each other better and better:

> Darren: ... it's like you're part of each other ... that's the way I look at it. I can say something and (Elsa) will say "well, I was just thinking that" ... This happens often now ... but gradually you become like each other in some ways. You just grow with each other and ... it becomes very comfortable ... We've grown up with each other ...

Spouses feel comfortable enough to be themselves and are not afraid to express their true feelings. Being able to be themselves reduces tension and facilitates having fun together:

> Barb: I think (it's more comfortable) than when we were first married. Because I think when you're first married ... you're a little uptight and you're tense because you have to develop this relationship, and now we've been together so long that ... I suppose you take each other for granted to a certain degree, but I think that we're just so comfortable with each other that it's a nice feeling ... We know each other so well that ... it's just more fun. We can be more relaxed and everything's more fun.

For Darren being himself involves expressing "sick humor":

> Darren: Some sick humor ... Hiding underneath the bed and grabbing her leg ... Life is too short, so you better have some fun ...

Engaging in behaviors that make spouses feel cared for and special deepens the connection. Feeling loved and cared for creates a sense of warmth between couples:

> Darren: ... I just get a warm feeling about it ... I don't even think about it ... This is what we do, this is how it goes and everything's very comfortable.
>
> Fran: ... he will often come home at lunch so we have lunch together or ... we find a little pocket of time or he'll phone and we meet for coffee or something like that ... We try and do things alone with the intention of let's do it alone and lets just gaze into each other's eyes and talk ...
>
> Brian... when I come home at lunch and no one's in the house, it's like coming home to a house, but when she's home, then it's sort of coming home to a home ... her presence is comforting.

The deep connection is sometimes hard to describe with words. Bob was on the verge of tears a couple of times when he was asked about what it is like to be in his marriage:

> Bob: When it's very special I guess it's hard to put into words ... I'll probably start crying.
>
> Cindy: He quoted Browning ... how do I love you let me count the ways ... He couldn't come up with his own words ... well words can never say can they ... the essence has to be lived.

I also found it difficult to find the words to really describe the feeling I got when I was with these couples. I did, however, make an attempt:

> Interviewer: I left the interview feeling inspired and empowered. I felt that I had been sitting with a couple who had a very deep, loving, respectful relationship.
>
> Interviewer: ... something deeper than a friendship, and he couldn't quite put the words to it ... but certainly that it was deeper, that there was a lot of caring and a lot of loving. I left the interview feeling that I had been sitting

with a couple who enjoyed each other and have felt very good in their relationship.

Interviewer: It was so much fun as (Elsa and Darren) became excited as they talked about their stories, laughed with each other and some of the things that they'd been through together ... the whole sense in the room was very warm, relaxed, just fun, and I enjoyed the loving way they interacted with their children.

Spouses who are deeply connected want to be together.

Wanting to be Together

Brian: ... time together is not as structured as every Friday night ... but we spend a lot of time together.

When spouses grow together, which energizes the relationship they want to be together. The spouses interviewed feel lucky to be in their marriage and are motivated to make time for each other. Finding time together may require some ingenuity, and spouses have separate activities as well.

Given the respect, care, and growing attraction within these relationships, it is not surprising that these spouses feel fortunate to be with each other. Spouses feel lucky that they can have a loving relationship and can pursue their interests within these marriages:

Fran: ... I feel like I have the best of both worlds because I can have this husband and family and lifestyle and friends, and yet I still have time and energy and the means to pursue other things that interest me. So I don't know what more I could ask for ... I can't dream of being anywhere else.

Brian: Yeah. I wouldn't wanna be.

Tom: ... looking back there was never a time when I thought I'd rather be with someone else, that was never something I wanted.

Being respected and cared for feels good and couples, therefore, want to spend time together. They want to maintain their deep connection and find that they have to make time to talk in order to do so. When they find themselves busy and losing touch with each other, they are motivated to find time to reconnect:

> Fran: I would say we both acknowledge a need for (couple time) ... we realize that we can drift apart and then you kind of think ... "what's really happening in that persons life" ... So you try to make more of a priority ... I need that time with just him ... like a date or something like that ...

An important togetherness ritual for Debra and Don involves sitting around their fire pit. They shared their marital story with me as we sat around a raging fire on a cloudy fall evening:

> Debra: We usually have fires on Friday nights ... and sit out here for three or four hours on good days.

Since couples in these marriages have fun together they are motivated to find joint activities and to spend time together:

> David: (Barb) goes to church choir, and I used to go to Tai Chi ... and finally I said to her, how about if I join the choir because it's too much of a conflict to try to drop me off ... we've been in the choir now for a couple of years ... and we also go to Tai Chi together ...
>
> Don: We started curling together last year, because before that I was heavy into volleyball and that's not a sport that (we can both do) ... We try to do things together ... as much as we can in our spare time ...

Finding time for each other sometimes takes

persistence. Amanda had to be very persistent and creative to ensure that Tom made time for the family. Although he wanted that time it was Amanda who pursued the issue:

> Tom: ... and we talked about that and so we wrote into my appointment book every Tuesday or whatever, and so if someone asked if I could do a speech, I'd say sorry, I've got something else that night ... She pushed that ... I wouldn't have pursued it, and yet I always wanted to, but the idea of scheduling it, such a simple thing, but I don't think I would have come up with that idea ...

These couples highly value family time, which builds the connection between spouses and with their children. Many of the couples report that they had to structure this time:

> Darren: That was a rule. Fridays I would take off. I wouldn't work on a Friday so that we could be together as a family ... So it was certain rules, like we'll have a picnic together on a Saturday night, on the floor there, so it was certain things we do together.
>
> Cindy: We used to go for long walks and study things with the kids ... like you always took Sundays off ...

Darren often works long hours trying to build his business. It took some ingenuity and extra effort for Elsa to create family time with Darren.

> Elsa: ... he might have to stay a bit late but ... sometimes we might pop in and see him ... I'll bring supper over or whatever, and so we're there together ...

All of the couples interviewed reported having separate activities, although most of their free time was spent together. As discussed under the category "Expanding Oneself", involvement in different activities re-energize

the relationship. Ironically, Barb and David state in unison: "We don't do everything together":

> Barb: ... we have actually created a number of joint interests, but not so much that it's smothering. I think we still have to have time with the girls, time with the guys ...

Feeling romantic is an important part of experiencing empowering connections.

Feeling Romantic

> Darren: ... keeping the romance and the marriage going and trying to grow all the time, and the adventure. That's important ...

In energizing intimate relationships, couples continue to experience romance. Romantic activities include having fun together, special private moments, and caring gestures.

The emotional connection between spouses fuels the physical attraction, which fosters romance. Behaving in romantic ways, in turn, fuels the fire and heightens the attraction so that the relationship keeps the sparks:

> Cindy: ... a little bit of romance in that he'd come home and reach in his pocket and give me a little rock ... he still does that kind of thing ... There's a romantic itch to him that's showed itself from time to time and I suppose that's the spark thing ...

Romance is experienced in different ways for couples. It involves engaging in activities together, having fun together, and planning a special evening.

> Debra: ... we still do things together, like once in a while golf. Keeping active as a couple sparks interest in each other.

> David: ... we took off and stayed over night at the Hilton ... we have fun together ...

Talking and connecting are viewed as special moments that rekindle the excitement:

> Barb: I don't think we just wait for our anniversary to celebrate I think we take other times when we do that, maybe in a small way, that may mean nothing to somebody else, but walking down the alley with the dog ... that's our moment .. it could be anything. Shopping for this picture ... that was a moment that we shared ... I think it's those things ... that kindle the excitement.

Caring behaviors and affection express the strong emotion couples feel for each other. According to Fran, it is the small special things they do for each other that are most important. Some of these things include expressions of affection, such as notes or buying a spouse their favorite candy:

> Fran: ... if you take my hand ... physical touching or ... I'll go and give him a neck rub while he's sitting at the computer or something like that. So there's sort of an exchange as well ... words ... on occasion we left notes for each other ... That he missed me or ... you wrote a note once in my school book ... and I saw it when I went to school ... that kind of thing. Or sometimes, like yesterday you brought me home the kind of candy that I like ... it's the small things that make the big difference.

During the interviews couples often showed affection. For example, Amanda and Tom sat closely to each other and frequently had a hand on the other's lap. They talked about how much they like to hug and touch each other:

> Amanda: Affection is there too because both of us like to hug and touch each other ... even just walking by each other we like to touch each other. It's always been that way, and neither one of us think twice about it.
>
> Sexuality is part of feeling romantic.

Feeling Sexual

The deep emotional connection couples experience is reflected in their sexual connection, which grows a long with the relationship.

Loving respectfully is the aphrodisiac for these couples; when spouses feel respected and cared for they experience sexual desire for their spouse. Affection and sexuality are an expression of caring and are a natural response to feeling respected and cared for. Verbal and non-verbal communication are the modes through which "Loving Respectfully" is displayed daily in words and behavior:

> Debra: ... And it starts from the minute you wake up in the morning ... Don't all day be a grump and go about your own way ... and then expect to hop into bed ... If you're not loving a person all day long, then it's just sex ... it isn't as fulfilling.

The sexual union enriches the relationship and deepens the connection. According to Brian, making love connects him and Fran at a deeper level:

> Brian: ... probably enriches it ... it's intimate and it gives you that sense of being close. And sort of touches at a deeper level ... For me it's sort of good because it's hard for me to get to a really deep level of talking ...

The sexual realm of the relationship grows and becomes more fulfilling as the relationship grows and develops. As discussed earlier in the manuscript, Loving respectfully fosters Expanding One's Self. Expanding one's self increases the attraction between spouses which is reflected in their sexual relationship. As spouses grow, gain

confidence and become more comfortable with themselves, it is reflected in their sexual relationship:

> Fran: ... I don't think the whole process of becoming a woman ... was very easy for me ... I didn't feel comfortable with it ... tying my experience with my mother into all that ... but again, it's been a process over the years that is kind of changing and as I've gained more knowledge of who I am, and feeling comfortable with all those things ... that's kind of come together ...

Education about sexuality adds information and can open up the lines of communication:

> Tom: ... when (Amanda) took a course on human sexuality ... she use to read books on it, and we practiced the homework.
>
> Amanda: ... he'd say got any homework, I'll help you with it.

When couples are able to communicate and know each other well, they learn what their partner enjoys sexually. The sexual aspect of their relationship is sacred. Since partners trust each other, and completely know each other they are comfortable together. Being comfortable with each other means that they can be themselves. This makes sex more fun:

> David: ... we know each other so well that ... it's just more fun ... And it's more relaxed because you've known each other for 27 years, and you know what the other person likes ...

Spouses in empowering connections expect future growth.

Expecting Future Growth

These couples report anticipating new challenges and a better relationship in the future.. They expect to continue growing as their children move out, they retire, and face

the loss of their spouses. They, however, feel that being together makes future challenges easier.

The marriages of the couples interviewed have undergone continual growth and spouses anticipate that their marriages will continue to grow and improve. Spouses anticipate that they will grow spiritually, individually, and as a couple. They are not, however, always sure what adventures lay ahead or how the relationship will improve:

> Amanda: I can't think of how it could be better, but that's what I thought before and it got better, so I don't know.

They do not know how they will adjust to having their children leave home. Others wonder how they will adapt to retirement:

> David: ... I would say for me there's a lot of areas I have to work on ... to me it never ends ... the relationship and myself ... I think it's a continual ... effort that you have to go through ... you can never, ever stop ...

The sense of security creates a sound base from which they can deal with future difficulties and adventures. Spouses feel that the challenges ahead of them will be easier to deal with because they will be together:

> Don: ... my main goal is to be happy and to have a good friend ... and those have been met ... and I know there's going to be more challenges but I've got the best partner to go through them with.

The reality of death is something they are cognizant of, but do not dwell on. Spouses love and care greatly for each other and find the thought of loss painful. Although the death of spouse is anticipated with dread they are

confident they can survive it and will cherish their memories:

> Amanda: That's not something I worry about. No I don't think a lot about him dying, I mean the thought of it is horrible, I say we have to go together, but it would be difficult, although we'd survive it.
>
> Cindy: It's scary ... I would have to feel fortunate it was a rich time.

*** Synopsis ***

Empowering connections evolve as spouses continually grow. Connecting emotionally occurs as couples communicate and resolve conflict. They develop relationships based on loving respectfully. Loving respectfully creates synergy and empowers spouses towards expanding one's self. When spouses expand themselves they bring energy created from growth back into the relationship. Spouses Experiencing empowering connections feel energized by the relationship. This energy is invested into the relationship when spouses communicate and continue connecting emotionally, and loving respectfully. This leads to expanding one's self and experiencing empowering connections. In this manner, couples continually build their relationships as they cycle through the four phases of relationship development which characterize empowering connections.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Theoretical Issues

This study employed the grounded theory approach to begin to conceptualize the process of developing a marriage characterized by individual and relationship growth.

The results of the current study can be considered a preliminary substantive theory. Substantive theory falls somewhere between working hypotheses of everyday life and traditional scientific theories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Substantive theory is different from traditional scientific theories that seek to generate confirmable propositions generated from a formal system (Hergenhahn, 1984). The use of substantive theory, in this study, is consistent with the history of family therapy theories which seldom meet the criteria of scientific theory (Fine & Turner, 1991). The findings from a grounded theory study are most useful when viewed wholistically rather than broken into parts and measured for cause and effect. The inter-relatedness of properties, subcategories and categories are the foundation of the results. Hergenhahn (1984) argues that for theory to be useful it needs to generate new research and synthesize observations. The preliminary substantive theory presented has implications for new research and offers a synthesis of observations of those in marriages in which individual and relationship growth is experienced.

Developing a Theory

Cronbach (1986) argues that determinative propositions that generalize to all situations cannot be expected in the social sciences. The results of this study are not designed to make wide sweeping predictions about all those in marriages characterized by individual and relationship growth. Further cases need to be studied in order to develop a dense substantive theory.

Hergenhahn (1984) states that some theories or models are highly developed and concentrate on a small area, providing great detail but within a limited domain, while other models cover an extremely large domain but do so at the expense of detail. This study is of a small area and reflects the stories of six couples who were willing to be interviewed. It is a unique sample of couples whose marriages have not only endured over time, but in which spouses report individual and relationship growth. The couples had been married 15 to 41 years and offered rich experiences from their shared lives together. The study does not include couples who did not want to be interviewed or felt that they did not meet the criteria. The study involved couples from a very select sample who were well educated and referred to the study by my family, friends, and colleagues. How the theory relates to other populations is unknown.

During the initial development of a theory it is helpful to minimize the differences between participants so

that basic categories and their properties can be established. Sampling of different groups and different types of groups within different larger groups expands a preliminary model into a theory. When the original theory fails to account for variation uncovered through additional research, these new specificities are added to the theory, which becomes more comprehensive. The more systematic and widespread the theoretical sampling, the more conditions and variations that will be discovered and built into the theory, therefore, the greater its generalizability (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Further research studies that sampled more couples, younger couples, and couples in long-term marriages who do not report growth would enhance this study. The conditions that enable people from abusive homes to grow in their marriage would also add dimension to the study. The issue of power and marital growth would be interesting given the attention power in marriage has received. Interviewing a more diverse population would make the theory more comprehensive and enable the theory to postulate how differing events affect marriage.

By sampling different groups a theory is built rather than tested for an absolute truth. Cronbach (1986) argues that social science theory is moving in this direction:

> ... the progress will not be toward theory of which Saturnians dream. It will be the kind of progress seen in architecture, music, and philosophy. Each of these fields has become richer in each century, the contribution of the

> past remaining a resource for the present. We do not store up truths or laws. What social scientists mostly harvest are additional concepts and inquiry skills, along with records of events observed (p. 104).

According to Hergenhahn (1984), it is also important that a theory synthesize observations. The synthesis of observations, from this study, is summarized below.

Summary of Results

The story line that ensued from the interviews is characterized by a core category entitled "empowering connections", which refers to relationships that energize people to exercise their inner strengths to better themselves and their relationship. Empowering connections continually evolve and create energy that fosters individual and relationship growth. The process of relationship functioning in energizing intimate relationships involves four categories: Connecting Emotionally, Loving Respectfully, Expanding One's Self, and Experiencing Empowering Connections.

These relationships are characterized by partners who feel attracted to their spouses and experience continually evolving friendships. By connecting emotionally and communicating with each other, couples moved from a relationship based on physical attraction alone to a discovering that they have similar values and like their partners' personality. Couples talk and listen to each other, which allows them to understand and empathize with the other's point of view. This facilitates conflict

resolution. Love and respect motivates couples, in marriages characterized by growth, to sort through arguments. Connecting emotionally and communicating expedite the process of working through conflict. Connecting emotionally enables people to develop a relationship based on loving respectfully, which is reflected in the positive, and respectful ways spouses treat each other. Respecting spouses means trusting them, making them a priority and accepting them just the way they are. Caring about another person means wanting the best for that person and offering support which is displayed by affection, listening, and helpful behaviors. Caring means that spouses are motivated to meet their partners needs. Caring, respecting, and feeling secure result in a relationship environment that empower spouses to expand themselves.

Expanding one's self includes gradually developing self confidence from taking risks, experiencing different situations and getting feedback from one's spouse. With the encouragement and persistent pushes from each other couples move towards growth especially when faced with turning points in their lives. Expanding one's self enhances the marriage and experiencing empowering connections includes feeling energized, deepening the connection, feeling romantic, and anticipating future growth.

When spouses grow and change there is a continual re-discovering of each other, which re-energizes the relationship. Spouses who experience empowering connections

are motivated to continue communicating and connecting emotionally. The positive feelings they experience increases their respect, care, and commitment, which leads to a greater sense of feeling secure in the marriage. This empowers partners to continue expanding themselves, which results in a continuous upward spiralling of relationship functioning. Empowering connections, therefore, are dynamic and evolving.

In the remainder of this chapter the results of this study are discussed in relation to existing literature on marriage.

Integration of Findings with Existing Literature

Significant factors that arose from the interviews are largely consistent with previous research, which provides validity for the study. Marriage interaction has been extensively studied, and it is not surprising that the conditions described by the couples in the current study were similar to previous studies on marriage. The results from this study, however, make a unique contribution to the understanding of marriage. The findings differ in their emphasis from previous research about marriage, which tends to focus on specific relationship variables viewed in isolation. These variables, when studied independently of each other, do not capture the complex processes of relationship functioning. The major difference and greatest contribution of this study is the explication of processes involved in creating a marriage, which fosters individual

and relationship growth. This study specifies the interconnected relationship between numerous factors involved in marital functioning.

Exploring the similarities and differences between the results from this study and existing research and theory furthers the understanding of marriage. Much of the previous research has focused on marital satisfaction, which is at times measured dichotomously with satisfied and dissatisfied as the options. Alternatively, some of the research has employed a continuous scale ranging from low satisfaction to high satisfaction. Further confusing the literature is that other researchers have measured happiness without distinguishing it from satisfaction. For example, much of Gottman's (1984) research on marital conflict focuses on distinguishing between satisfied and dissatisfied couples while Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1995) talk about happy couples. The couples interviewed in this study reported being very happy and more than satisfied with their marriages. This suggests that there may be similarities between the variables found in marital satisfaction/ happiness research and the current study. The couples in marriages that promote growth, however, would likely be found at the high end of satisfaction/ happiness inventories and their relationship may be qualitatively different from those at marginal levels of satisfaction. The terms satisfaction and happiness are static, in contrast, this study illuminates the evolution of relationship functioning.

The process of relationship development uncovered in this research suggests factors that may distinguish a merely satisfactory marriage to one that fosters individual and relationship growth. The areas of divergence and convergence between the current study, previous research, my clinical experience, and my own personal experience are discussed in the remainder of this chapter.

I include my personal experience since it parallels my clinical work. A clinician or therapist always brings personal experience into clinical interactions. How these are used are important and demand critical reflection on the therapist's part. I often try to apply my theoretical knowledge and research discoveries to my own marriage, which has often been helpful. I feel that it is very important to practice what I preach. I am sure that I am more effective as a therapist if I have experienced what I recommend. Even more valuable is that I take my personal self and relationship discoveries into my work. When I discover, for example, that persistently working through a difficult time results in a more rewarding relationship I can take this knowledge and belief back to the couples with whom I work. Couples often come feeling discouraged and questioning whether there is hope for their relationship. I believe that there is always hope if both spouses are willing to make changes.

Connecting Emotionally

Spouses in marriages characterized by growth feel

attracted to each other and develop a friendship. Friendship has been identified as a factor in long-term and happy marriages (Fehr, 1988; Lauer, Lauer & Kerr, 1990: Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1985). The spouses in this study developed their friendships by getting to know each other through talking and spending time together. Intimacy, self-disclosure and conflict resolution have been found to be predictors of marital satisfaction (Gottman, 1984; Hansen & Schuldt, 1984; Hendrick, 1981; Markman, 1991).

Reiss and Lee (1988) outline a similar process of relationship development as described by the couples in this study in the wheel theory of love. The wheel theory involves four processes in the development of love: (a) rapport; (b) self-revelation; (c) mutual dependency: and (d) intimacy need fulfillment. Rapport refers to the extent that each person feels comfortable, understood and able to talk. Self-revelation occurs when rapport is established. Mutual dependency occurs when people become dependent on each other to engage in behaviors that cannot be done alone. Intimacy and need fulfillment refers to the need for love, someone to confide in and feel understood by. According to the wheel theory, like the category connecting emotionally, developing communication involves self disclosure. In contrast to this study, in the wheel theory the influence of sociocultural backgrounds and role conceptions are addressed. The results of this study add depth to the wheel theory by describing other relevant factors, like respect,

in the dynamic development of a loving relationship.

Through communicating spouses discover that they have many similar values. Research has found that people in satisfying marriages are more similar to their spouse in terms of personality, socioeconomic class, and ethnicity, than those in unsatisfactory marriages (Kear, 1978; Kvanli & Jennings, 1987; Mascie-Taylor & Vandenberg, 1988; Phillips, Fulker, Carey & Nagoshi, 1988; Richards, 1989; White & Hatcher, 1984). Complementary theory of attraction postulates that people are attracted to people with different but complementary personality traits. This theory, however, has received little research support (Reiss & Lee, 1988). What similarity and complementary theories fail to address is how differences between spouses can foster growth as was described by the couples in the current study. The couples in marriages characterized by growth report that differences when understood, accepted, and respected can foster individual growth in spouses. It may be that couples in moderately satisfied marriages have been unable to resolve differences and accept the individuality of spouses. This study supports the marriage enrichment philosophy, which states that resolving conflicts stemming from differences leads to growth (Mace, 1982).

My own critical reflection about differences in my marriage provide additional evidence of the importance of communicating about differences. Dwayne and I started dating when I was sixteen and he was eighteen. Although we

have similar values, we have developed very different interests over the years. This has been a source of conflict, but the differences are also a part of our relationship that we both very much value. Part of the evolution of learning to value this for myself has been in letting go of the mistaken belief that there was something wrong with our marriage if we did not do everything together. This was reinforced by the couples I interviewed who have grown through their differences. This experience has also influenced my clinical work. I seldom accept the commonly presented problem by couples that they are "just too different". I find the complaint "too different" often reflects deeper hurts and unfulfilled desires. Some couples who come to therapy need some assistance in grieving the loss of the hope that, for example, their spouse will share an interest in all of their hobbies.

This study found that talking about thoughts and feelings, which furthers understanding, facilitates the development of emotional connections. Studies have supported the contention that communication is vital to marital success (Cole, 1985, Lauer et al., 1990; Roberts, 1980; Stahmann & Salts, 1993). Communication skill training has been an important component of behavioral marital therapy, premarriage, and enrichment courses. All of these programs have been found to improve marital satisfaction (Bader & Pearson, 1988; Giblin, Sprenkle, & Sheehan, 1985; Markman et al., 1993; Parish, 1990; Zimpfer, 1988; Snyder &

Wills, 1989). A focus on communication skills in isolation, however, does not capture the complex interaction between communication and other significant relationship factors. The interaction between relationship factors and communication has been largely ignored. The couples interviewed reported that they can talk to each other about everything including hurts and sadness. It could be hypothesized that communication that involves talking about just about everything, including hopes and fears, distinguishes satisfactory marriages from one's that foster growth.

The current study reveals a number of variables that facilitate communication including a sense of security and trust, which interact in a recursive manner. When spouses trust each other they can talk openly, which builds trust and a sense of security. Communication emerged as the mode through which relationship factors such as acceptance and support are developed. When spouses respect each other their communication reflects this, which results in a reciprocation of respectful interaction. Non-verbal communication displays caring through affection and attentive listening. Given the interaction between communication and other relationship variables it is likely that if, for example, respect is lacking in the relationship communication skills will not have the power they do in a relationship based on loving respectfully. In fact Barnes et al. (1984) argue that positive regard largely mediates

the relationship between communication and marital satisfaction.

Gender differences did not emerge as a category in this study. The couples did, however, report having fairly traditional roles and the majority of wives stayed home with their children when they were young. These roles were flexible, however, and many of the husbands took over household responsibilities when spouses were pursuing other goals. Power issues were not specifically addressed and questions about the distribution of power would have enhanced this study.

Although, four of the six couples did report that one of the spouses was more communicative than the other this tendency was distributed equally between males and females. There is some evidence that gender differences more often emerge in dissatisfied marriages (Gottman, 1994; Levenson et al., 1933; Noller, 1982). This may account for the lack of differences found in this study with spouses who are very happy in their marriage.

Dealing with Conflict

The communication processes involved in resolving conflict have been extensively studied. Although the results of this study emphasize the importance of resolving conflict, conflict resolution is only one aspect of empowering connections. In the marriages studied conflict resolution often led to growth, however, conflict resolution emerged as a necessary but not sufficient condition in

empowering connections. In other words, conflict resolution may be necessary for creating a satisfying marriage, but for marriages to become empowering an abundance of other factors are necessary.

Gottman (1984) and Markman (1991), in contrast, argue that the resolution of conflict is what distinguishes successful and unsuccessful marriages. Although, Gottman does highlight the importance of the expression of positive affect and behavior he maintains his focus on the resolution of conflict. The differing emphasis between research on conflict and the current study may be a reflection of the couples studied. Gottman (1994) and Markman (1991) studied couples who reported to be satisfied or dissatisfied, and conflict resolution emerged as a distinguishing factor. Since Gottman and Markman base their opinions on research that largely involved observing couples resolving conflict in a lab, it is not surprising that they view conflict resolution as the central aspect distinguishing satisfactory from unsatisfactory marriages.

The couples in this study talked about how they were able to resolve problems by sharing their thoughts, feelings, and experiences rather than criticizing and name calling. In contrast, I often work with couples whose communication is characterized by insults and a long list of grievances. Many of these couples have been fighting over unresolved issues for many years. I have seen couples make tremendous changes in their relationship and feeling towards

each other when they begin to really talk to each other about themselves. I try to interrupt the cycle of negativity and help each spouse identify and own their feelings rather than accuse and blame their partner. Spouses are usually better able to hear and understand upset when it is not presented as a personal attack. When anger is dissected and expressed with the hurt and explanation of its origin it often becomes understandable. I know a relationship has become very destructive, however, when spouses react to honest heart felt feelings with accusation rather than understanding. For example, this occurred with a couple I worked with who were well into Gottman's (1994) cycle of negativity. Brenda complained that Joe verbally abused her, did not spend enough time with her, and took her for granted. Joe acknowledged that he could say cruel things and had difficulties talking about his feelings. When Joe talked openly about the pain from his abusive child hood and expressed his love and dedication to Brenda she responded with a "but you always ..." followed by a list of complaints. When this was pointed out to her she admitted that she did not believe what he was saying. I was, however, moved by what appeared to me to be a sincere expression of feelings. The trust in this relationship had eroded and a great deal of effort was required to recreate it. Building the trust involved not just clear communication, but behavior change characterized by what emerged in this study under the category loving

respectfully.

Loving Respectfully

Alanis Morissette captures some of the important characteristics described by couples, in marriages that grow, in her song "Head over Heals":

> You treat me like I'm a princess.
> You ask how my day was.
> You've already won me over in spite of me ...
> Don't be surprised if I fall head over heals ...
> Don't be alarmed if I love you for all that you are ...
> You're the bearer of unconditional things ...
> thanks for your patience ...
> You're the best listener that I've ever met ...
> You're my best friend.
> Best friend with benefits ...
> I've never felt this healthy before.

Loving respectfully emerged as central to individual and relationship growth. Research on long-term marriages has found that love, affection, humor, intimacy, acceptance, friendship, and commitment are related to marital satisfaction (Lauer, Lauer & Kerr, 1990; Roberts, 1980; Sporakowski & Hughston, 1978). These factors have been identified on questionnaires and interviews, but have received little indepth study as to how they are manifested in relationships, and lead to satisfying marriages. The results of this study integrate some of these factors and explicate how they interact in a way that leads to growth.

Surprisingly I had not thought a lot about respect and love as a part of marital growth and did not include them in the original literature review. I discovered that they were, however, on my husband's mind when I recently watched

our wedding video. His toast to the bride reflected characteristics of loving respectfully:

> Nancy and I have been together for almost six years as I look back over those six years I see respect I see sharing, I see happiness, I see tears but most of all I see love.
> Not just the love that I feel for Nancy, but the love my family feels as well.
> I had a dream and that dream was to marry a very beautiful, very intelligent woman, and today that dream came true ...

A number of writers have presented theories of the different types of love (Aron & Henkemeyer, 1995; Lee, 1973; Sternberg, 1986). Fehr (1988) in her study of the components of love found that trust, caring, honesty, friendship, respect, concern for other's well-being, commitment, acceptance, and supportiveness are central to love. Sternberg (1986) argues that there are three components of love including intimacy, passion and commitment, and when they coexist together a consummate love or complete love exists. The couples in this study described having all three components. The intimacy component refers to feelings of closeness in which there is a desire to promote the welfare of the loved one, high regard, emotional support, and intimate communication. The passion component can be expressed by: (a) kissing; (b) hugging; (c) making love, and was evident in the marriages of those interviewed for this study. According to Sternberg the commitment component is vital to the continuance of relationships, and is essential to getting through hard times.

Sternberg (1986) does not address how intimacy and commitment lead to individual and relationship growth. For the couples interviewed, commitment exceeded a resignation to stay in a marriage, but included a commitment to working through problems, making the relationship better, and to enhancing their partners' well-being, which may distinguish these couples from those in satisfactory but not growth promoting marriages. Being committed to the relationship, trusting, and accepting each other builds a sense of security in the marriage. This commitment and sense of security are crucial to the relationship. Couples who come for therapy often have a tenuous commitment to the marriage and a sense of security in the relationship is lacking. This makes changing oneself riskier and more frightening.

Since it is within an atmosphere of security that spouses feel safe to grow, a commitment to the relationship is important to the success of marital therapy. Marital therapy without a commitment to spouse as a person and to the relationship may be very difficult. Clinically this degree of commitment is hard to achieve. I have had separated couples come for therapy who were wondering if they could put their marriage back together. It often seemed that one spouse was more eager than the other, and I have had little success with these couples. Perhaps the therapy was doomed to failure because of the lack of commitment to the marriage. It may have been in the couples best interest if I had been more confrontational about a

commitment to the marriage before proceeding.

As I reflect back on my own marriage I recall what I believe now to be a turning point in our marriage and commitment was involved. I was very frustrated with some of my husband's behaviors and had been fantasizing about leaving the marriage. I, however, made a decision to stay for better or worse. I believe that it was after I made the emotional commitment that real positive changes began to occur our marriage.

Sternberg (1986) and Fehr (1988) present respect as a component of love and minimize the importance of respect in fostering individual and relationship growth. In this study respect had a central place, and was linked to numerous other relationship factors like conflict resolution and dealing with differences. The tendency to minimize the centrality of respect by relationship researchers is reflected in the fact that respect is included in Rubin's (1973) "liking" scale, but not in the "love" scale and that it has received relatively little research attention. Furthermore, theories of love do not address the process of developing a loving relationship, with the exception of the wheel of love (Reiss & Lee, 1988).

Loving respectfully parallels Rogers' (1951) concept of positive regard. Positive regard involves receiving warmth, love, sympathy, care, respect and acceptance, which leads to self-regard. When this positive regard is unconditional people can experience self worth no matter what they do.

Rogers views respect as a component of acceptance. In the current study acceptance and respect are viewed as being intricately related, fostering communication, affection and understanding. The results from this study indicate that unconditional regard in marriage can enhance self worth, and empowering connections foster self confidence. The relationship between respect, acceptance and building self-confidence has not been addressed in the marital satisfaction research. It could be hypothesized, however, that satisfactory marriages are characterized by resignation or resentful acceptance rather than acceptance based on respect and love for the other person. Developing acceptance based on understanding and respect, therefore, emerge as important to creating a very rewarding marriage.

The process of developing acceptance has been largely ignored by previous researchers. In contrast, in this study several processes involved in developing acceptance are presented. For example, couples reported that it was easier for them to accept their partners' behavior when they could understand them, which requires open and honest communication. Ironically, it is when they accept their spouse, who then feels unconditionally loved, that change is more likely to occur. Therapeutically this suggests an emphasis on changing oneself and acceptance of spouse as important goals for therapy. In fact this is the philosophy behind Integrative Behavioral Couple Therapy (IBCT) (Christensen et al.). This involves communicating with the

goal of making previously contemptuous behaviors understandable (excluding abuse).

Intuitively the importance of acceptance and positive regard makes a lot of sense: who among us does not want to be accepted for who we are? In my own life and work with clients it is a matter of finding a balance. Some behaviors are not acceptable and a clear bottom line is needed. I agree, however, that a lot of talking needs to occur to process these problems.

For example, the experiences of Brenda and Joe indicate the search for balance. One of Brenda's complaints about Joe was that he was a workaholic. Joe worked very long hours. Although he was looking for another job, working a lot was very much a part of his personality. Certainly there was room for moderation on Joe's part, however, Brenda needed to decide whether she could accept this part of Joe. It would involve finding ways to meet some of her needs separate from Joe.

I think that one of the respondent's put the dilemma very well, Cindy: " ... you accept a person in their entirety ... it's not about making them over ...". Perhaps this should be a statement of obligation on the marriage license that young couples should sign. The other side of this dialectic however, according to spouses in this study, is that when you really care for someone you try not to engage in behaviors that hurt that person.

The role of humor, which has been found to be related

to marital satisfaction (Bradbury, 1991; Lauer & Lauer; 1986; Roberts, 1980; Ziv & Gadish, 1989) is further conceptualized in the present study. Humor was found, in this study, to be involved in the process of accepting each other, prioritizing issues, and having fun together. My own experience is that finding humor in the midst of a fight can relieve pressure and put things into perspective. Incorporating humor into my, very serious, therapeutic work is a something I am hoping to do more of.

Couples in marriages characterized by individual and relationship growth engage in caring behaviors, which involves doing things for spouses that they appreciate. These caring gestures are reflective of behavioral therapy, which focuses on creating interpersonal interactions which are rewarding (Crowe & Ridley, 1990). From the behavioral perspective, marriages are satisfactory when rewards are greater than costs. In empowering connections spouses feel good when they receive caring gestures, which motivates them to reciprocate creating a recursive flow of positivity. Rather than settling for a balance of rewards over costs as in satisfactory marriages, continued increases in rewards over costs occur in empowering connections.

Caring gestures are a meaningful and fun part of my marriage. I once mailed a congratulations card to Dwayne at work after he received a job promotion. He tells me he keeps it on his desk and reads it for inspiration on tough days. I definitely feel more motivated to engage in caring

gestures when I am feeling good about the relationship. I have, however, pushed myself to do thoughtful things when the relationship has been at a low point and feel that this helped us move back into a cycle of positivity.

When couples come for therapy their motivation to engage in caring gestures tends to be quite low. I, however, continue to prescribe caring gestures. For example, asking that over the next week they surprise their spouse by doing something for them that they like. This was important for Brenda and Joe to do in order to begin to rekindle some positive experiences and feelings for each other.

Caring also means supporting each other and support has been found to buffer people from stress (Levenson, Carstensen, & Gottman, 1993). Supportive behaviors are further defined in this study. The couples, in this study, report that they feel supported by having someone listen to them, by knowing their spouse cares deeply about them, and by having someone to help relieve the pressures of household responsibilities. They gain strength from their partner's support which helps them cope. The support of family and friends were also identified as being important.

In clinical practice I often find that spouses need to be educated about how they can support their partner. I have had spouses report feeling helpless with, for example, their spouse's depression. They respond to their feelings of helplessness by withdrawing, which leaves their depressed

spouse feeling abandoned. Identifying the feelings involved and educating spouses can help clients disengage from this destructive pattern. Many clients are isolated and deprive themselves of the valuable friendships of others. Encouraging clients to develop a broader support system is often a very important part of my work.

The multigenerational transmission of family problems did not emerge as a central category/theme. Although a few of the couples reported having an abusive parent, the majority reported that their parents were happily married. This suggests that a happy family of origin may be conducive to developing a marriage in which individual and relationship growth occurs. The connection between having a positive parental role model of marriage and being in a marriage that fosters growth is consistent with the findings of a study by Fine and Hovestadt (1984). This study found that individuals who reported high measures of health in their family of origin had more positive perceptions of marriage in general.

I found it encouraging that the individuals in the study who came from dysfunctional families were able to create happy relationships. These individuals talked about how they were motivated to do something different from their parents. Unfortunately, doing something different does not always come easily. I find that people often have to process some of the pain and anger related to the past experience in order to disengage from these patterns. I

have found that dealing with the pain of my parents' divorce has been an important part of being able to allow myself to believe and trust the love my husband, Dwayne, has given me. Clinically, I find that some people are very motivated to do this kind of work and find it very healing. Others minimize childhood issues, but are able to make behavioral changes in their marriage and qualitatively improve it. It was important for Brenda and Joe to address family of origin issues. Joe had a verbally and physically abusive father and was horrified that he was in some ways similar to his father. He addressed in therapy how his feelings of inadequacy and fear of closeness drove him to push Brenda away by verbally abusing her.

Relationships based on loving respectfully can be compared to the secure relationships described by Bowlby (1973). According to Bowlby it is from a secure relationship with parents that children can risk exploring and expanding their experiences. This study suggests that a secure marital relationship can provide a similar secure base from which people can engage in endeavors which lead to growth.

The recursiveness of communication builds respect, caring, and fosters expanding one's self is similar to Maslow's (1962) hierarchy of needs. According to Maslow's hierarchy physiological, safety, belongingness, love, and esteem needs have to be met before people can self-actualize. In marriages characterized by individual and

relationship growth basic needs of love and respect are met, which empowers spouses to expand themselves.

Many of the relationship qualities involved in loving respectfully have been found to be related to marital satisfaction. It may be that in order to promote growth in relationships these qualities must all be present and/or interact in the recursive manner described by the couples in this study. Moderately satisfied marriages may be characterized by only some of these qualities, or to a lesser degree, than the couples in this study.

Expanding One's Self

Growth and change are central components for existential/humanistic theorists, and many of the principles they endorse were described by the couples in marriages characterized by growth.

Hendrix (1988) argues that to develop an enriching marriage personal growth is essential. The process of relationship development in empowering connections is similar to Hendrix's conscious marriage in several ways. For example spousal needs are highly valued, mutually gratifying behaviors are engaged in, and spouses take responsibility for their behavior and communication. Hendrix argues that marital growth reflects personal growth and healing childhood wounds in particular. Healing of childhood wounds, however, did not arise as a central aspect in empowering connections, although a number of couples reported that unmet childhood needs were realized in their

relationship.

A significant finding that I did not expect was the persistence spouses described. A number of couples reported that one of them initiated talking through conflict while the other tended to withdraw into themselves. The one who found talking easier would persistently encourage the other to express their feelings, which resulted in conflict resolution (spouses also seemed to have some sense of when they needed to give their partner some time to cool down). I did not find any literature that referred to the persistence I heard couples talking about as they encouraged and pushed each other to risk making changes and take on challenges.

The power of this persistence and encouragement is impressive. I wonder how often spouse's faith and belief in each other goes unsaid. How often does a spouse's pursuit of higher achievements spark fear in their partner? The knowledge that one can foster growth in one's partner by expressing belief in them and that this growth can even enhance the marriage may motivate a person to express these beliefs. This information is important for therapists and all married couples to know.

According to Aron and Aron (1986), people will maintain a relationship as long as it is perceived to promote expansion of the self. They state that expansion occurs through participating in outside experiences, which are brought back to the relationship by talking about the

experiences with one's spouse. According to Aron and Aron (1986) couples can keep things interesting by alternating between using the relationship as a support base to risk expanding, and discovering new aspects of each other. People who are already expanded, see more opportunities for expansion, and are more likely to pursue these expanding opportunities.

Aron and Aron (1986) do not address the important characteristics which empower spouses to grow. Relationships characterized by love, respect, security, and stability incite growth. Furthermore, Aron and Aron's (1986) theory views love merely in terms of how much a person can grow from their partner. Their theory does not capture how the couples in this study viewed their partner's well-being as a priority, which motivates them to encourage their partners to expand themselves. In addition Aron and Aron fail to address different kinds of love or quality of love relationships.

Marriage enrichment focuses on growth in marriage. Mace (1982) argues that in an enriched marriage spouses must grow individually and in tandem with their partner. Mace focuses on making a commitment to growth and change, communication and conflict resolution as keys to developing an enriched marriage, and these principles were described by the couples interviewed. Mace argues that a marriage without growth will stagnate, suggesting that individual and relationship growth distinguish low from high levels of

marital satisfaction and happiness. This study supports the philosophy and techniques used in marriage enrichment. Marriage enrichment has been directed at couples in satisfactory marriages that want to improve their marriage. I believe that marriage enrichment and the concept of growth in marriage have much to offer therapists working with a clinical population. They offer hope for a very rewarding marriage, something that couples seeking therapy have often lost sight of. A very good friend of mine and colleague who does a lot of work with couples did some proof reading for this manuscript. She was moved to tears as she read some of the transcript. She confided in me that she needed to hear some positive stories of marriage because she finds herself feeling discouraged by the gloomy couples with whom she works. Therapists must also believe in the growthful possibilities of marriage.

Experiencing Empowering Connections

The synergy that is created when two people build a relationship based on loving respectfully fosters growth, which in turn enriches the relationship creating a very rewarding marriage.

The couples, interviewed, reported that they enjoy spending time together, which is consistent with research on couples in long-term happy marriages who report that they enjoy being with their spouse (Cole, 1985; Lauer et al., 1990). Time spent together has been found to be a consistent predictor of marital satisfaction (Smith et al.,

1988). The couples reported that they like to spend most of their time together, but all had separate activities as well.

A high degree of connection does not, however, mean that they are fused. According to McGoldrick (1989) fusion occurs when a person's sense of self is dependent on another. Intimacy exists when couples appreciate the differences between them and see each other as separate individuals, which the couples in this study did. The concept of balance between independence and connection is an important premise of the Circumplex Model of healthy families (Olson et al., 1989). Studies have found that balanced families report less symptomology (Clarke (1984); Olson & Killorin (1984); Carnes (1987); Rodick, Henggeler & Hanson (1986).

The struggle between fusion and intimacy has been more predominant in my marriage and in the couples I work with than the couples in this study. A couple I worked with who had been married for over thirty years came for therapy when the husband was on the verge of leaving the relationship. Frank was full of anger and could hardly sit in the same room with his wife Gina. It became apparent that much of Frank's anger stemmed from suppression of his needs and wants. He felt controlled by Gina who insisted they engage in all the same extracurricular activities. Gina's self-esteem was largely based on the belief that if Frank really loved her he would want to do everything with her. Much of

the work for this couple was focused on developing separate identities. For Frank it involved identifying his needs and stating them clearly and for Gina developing self-esteem that was not dependent on Frank.

For couples in marriages that promote growth sexual intimacy is a way of expressing love, a way of feeling closer, and a reflection of respect. The couples in this study said that the sexual aspect of their relationship grew as they became closer and more comfortable with each other. This differs from the model of sexual dysfunction portrayed by Masters, Johnson and Kolodny (1982) who focus on performance problems, physiological responses, with an underlying assumption that sexual feelings follow from sexual function. The findings from the current study are consistent with Schnarch's (1997) theory of sexual functioning. Schnarch argues that sexual chemistry can flourish if both spouse are willing to grow. He views sexuality as a reflection of the emotional relationship not just as a sexual act. Schnarch believes that intimacy involves allowing oneself to be known in relationship to one's partner. Schnarch, however, neglects to focus on the powerful effect a loving spouse can have on an individual's personal growth. He does, however, capture some of the power of acknowledging peoples strengths when he notes that as a therapist:

> more and more, I am impressed by people's strengths rather than their weaknesses; as I increasingly dwell on the former rather than the

> latter, people seem to rise to the level of their abilities ..." (p. 398).

Although I strongly believe in identifying people's strengths it is not something that has always come naturally to me. I often have to remind myself to compliment others, but with practice this is becoming more natural to me. I always try to identify and label the strengths I see in my clients and I am often very impressed by their skills and warm personalities.

For myself, the encouragement of others who have believed in me and pointed out my strengths, have helped to keep me going during difficult times. I very much believe that Dwayne's unconditional love and belief in me has fostered my self-esteem.

The spouses in this study do this by continually affirming each other and expressing their belief in their partner. In this way spouses take on a therapeutic role with each other.

Kovacs (1988) who summarized developmental stage theories, presents marital growth in a linear manner. Many of the tasks he describes, however, were reported by the couples interviewed including the following: learning to deal with differences, accepting each other, and dealing with conflict while maintaining closeness. Couples description of their marriages correspond to the philosophy of existential/humanistic theorists, as they anticipate that they will continue to grow and experience more adventures in their continuing years together.

Although relatively little research has been conducted on couples who report being in marriages that foster individual and relationship growth, the happily married couples interviewed by Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1995), described similar marriages to the couples interviewed in this study. They reported having relationships based on love, friendship, commitment, shared values, passion, respect, enjoying each other, and mutual meeting of needs. To these couples being happy meant feeling respected, which was based on high regard for each other. Their love was based on the belief that their spouse was worthy of being loved, and spouses confidence grew when they risked trying new things.

As in the current study, Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1995) found that much of the energy and excitement in marriage comes from couples' genuine interest in each other and the fact that they were continually changing. Wallerstein and Blakeslee's (1995) study lends support to the finding, in the current study, that growth energizes and enriches relationships. In contrast to the current study, Wallerstein and Blakeslee present relationship functioning in a linear manner with an emphasis on stages, rather than a spiralling process of continual relationship development.

The couples Wallerstein and Blakeslee interviewed identified themselves as happily married couples suggesting that they may be qualitatively different from spouses who report marginal levels of satisfaction or happiness. Growth

was an important aspect for the happy couples studied by Wallerstein and Blakeslee's (1995) and the couples in this study suggesting that marital growth and happiness are intricately connected. This leads to the conclusion that the characteristics described by the couples in these studies interact in ways that lead to growth, which results in high levels of marital satisfaction and happiness.

EMPOWERING CONNECTIONS

A positive spiral of relationship functioning describes the process of relationship growth, which is captured under the core theme empowering connections. The recursiveness of love is reflected in the song "A Magic Penny" by Malvina Reynolds:

> Love is something if you give it away give it away
> Love is something if you give it away ... you end
> up having more. It's just like a magic penny.
> Hold it tight and you won't have any. Lend it
> spend it and you'll have so many ... they'll role
> all over the floor ... love is something if you
> give it away ...

The process of developing a marriage that promotes growth is complex and the interaction of concepts is crucial to understanding marriage. Couples create a positive spiralling of relationship functioning when they engage in mutually rewarding behaviors, which motivates more positive behaviors. They encourage each other to grow, which in turn enriches the relationship. The positive spiralling of relationship functioning is reflective of the concept of circular causality discussed by systems theorists, which

states that behavior is a result of complex cycles of interaction in which both partners participate (Crowe & Ridley, 1990). Circular causality has been identified in dysfunctional family interactions and neglected in relationship to positive interactions. Systems theorists have not highlighted the growth producing possibilities this concept suggest. The positive spiral that characterizes empowering connections, and unlocks these relationships from equilibrium or homeostasis, is love and respect. Expressing the love and respect in behaviors and words is essential because it can lead to further expression of this love through action, whereas failure to express can lead to further failure (Sternberg, 1986). This has crucial implications about how relationships, which begin on a positive plane can either spiral up and become enriching or spiral down and dissolve, with the expression of loving feelings and behavior being crucial factors.

In the study it is emphasized that the interaction between relationship variables and the recursiveness of relationship development. A focus on interaction between spouses eliminates blame and elicits spousal responsibility for their behavior. In my clinical work I find that couples often come to therapy with numerous complaints about their spouse, and stating if only he or she would change all would be well. The results of this study, suggests that encouraging personal responsibility and not waiting for one's spouse to change is an important clinical orientation

in working with couples. Spouses are responsible for sharing intimate information about themselves, and listening to their partner. Treating one's spouse with respect is vital.

The spiral of the relationship indicates downward movement, which suggests that relationship development is not continuously moving forward. The downwards movement illustrates the difficult times in the relationship including conflicts in the relationships and crises such as a job loss or death of a loved one. All of the couples interviewed reported that they had gone through some difficult times in their marriage. This finding normalizes difficult times in relationships; that even couples in very rewarding marriages have had problems. The process of relationship development described in this study reveals how these crises and problems can be overcome by some of the following: talking, listening and supporting each other.

I believe that reframing the difficulties of married life as potential growth experiences may inspire couples to persevere through difficult times. Indeed this is an important concept in marriage enrichment. Mace (1982) argues that hope that marriages can be more satisfying and rewarding if spouses are willing to change themselves is very important. He states that changing behavior requires energy and maybe some discomfort and pain. The exciting thing about empowering connections is that the relationship itself creates energy for change!

Implications

This study has significant implications about the processes involved in developing a marriage characterized by both individual and relationship growth. For people in satisfying marriages it may be relatively easy to incorporate some of these concepts into their marriage. People who are in very unsatisfying marriages may require the help of a marriage counsellor to apply the implications of this study to their marriage.

The clinical implications from this study involve techniques and ideas from many different theories, including systems and behavioral theories. This suggests that an integration of therapeutic techniques may be helpful in clinical practice. Based on the results of this study concepts that are relevent to marital therapy include the following: growing from differences, communicating with respect, acceptance, persistence, and focusing on strengths.

Very little is known at this time about the active ingredients of successful couple therapy (Jacobson & Addis, 1993). A study of therapeutic outcomes (Greenberg, James & Conry, 1988), however, supports the incorporation of concepts from this study into marital therapy. Greenberg et al. report five significant change processes, based on retrospective accounts, including the following: (a) expressing feelings; (b) learning to express needs; (c) acquiring understanding; (d) taking responsibility for one's own experiences; and (e) receiving validation from the

partner.

The results of this study could be applied to a premarriage course with a format based on the components of empowering connections. Exercises designed to operationalize each category could be developed. For example, couples could reconnect by creating a "first date", followed by lengthy discussions of early dating topics including feelings about their families, themselves, hopes for the future, and regrets. They could be asked to address a topic that they find difficult to discuss and be coached on how to resolve longstanding issues. Exercises designed to foster respect could include writing down and then sharing with spouses behaviors that reflect respect and caring. Couples could spend time talking and writing down how they have grown, individually, as a couple and how they would like to grow in the future. These goals might include ways of building romance and excitement into their relationship. These exercises would also be very applicable to marriage counselling.

My experience conducting this study has altered the way I view marriage, interact with my husband and work with couples. I clearly had some belief that marriages could be growth promoting or I would not have embarked on this study. However, I was overwhelmed by the love and respect that characterized the relationships of the couples I interviewed. My faith in marriage was revitalized.

After the first few interviews, although I felt elated

by the experience, I also felt somewhat resentful that my husband did not always treat me as respectfully as I would like. As I began the analysis and started to conceptualize the processes involved, however, I began to recognize the futility in blame and recognize what I might be able to do differently. This involved engaging in caring behaviors even when I was feeling unappreciated, persisting with discussion in times of conflict and trying to own my feelings rather than accuse (this required extreme effort). Often when I am able to disengage from the attack mode, Dwayne responds in a much less defensive manner and is able to take responsibility for his part in the conflict. This works the other way around as well. I feel our marriage has grown simultaneously with my work on this study.

I think what has impacted me and my clinical work the most is the power of treating people with respect and focusing on their strengths. Prior to this study my work was focused largely on trying to fix the clinically identified problems. I now go to great efforts to identify the strengths I see in couples and view my role differently. Rather than trying to find solutions I focus on assisting clients to talk through the difficulty, find what works best for them, and encourage them to express their love and appreciation in words and deeds. I have also used the results of this study in premarriage workshops.

I try to focus on the positives with Dwayne as well. It has only been recently that I recognized that I was not

treating him with as much respect as I thought I was. Pointing out his strengths and trusting him are ways I try to express my respect.

Conclusion

This study sheds additional light on previous research on marriage by focusing on the process of developing a marriage in which individual and relationship growth occurs. It is the first step in the process of understanding the complex functioning of developing such marriages. The study reveals that marriages based on loving respectfully create synergy, which **EMPOWERS** spouses to expand. Expanding one's self re-energizes relationships creating a spiraling upwards of relationship functioning. The couples interviewed were inspiring in their relationship success!

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APPENDIX A

Interview Questions

1. Tell me a story about a nourishing relationship which continually grows and in which each person experiences personal growth.
Tell me about your relationship experience. What does it look like? How does it feel? What would symbolize how you feel in this relationship? How would you describe your relationship? What do you value in your relationship? Are there still areas that you are still working on?

2. Tell me the story of how your relationship has evolved. What were your expectations of marriage? Were they met? Has your marriage changed? How?

3. How were you able to work through the difficult times? Any crises? A particular time. Did you grow from these experiences?

4. How have you been able to keep the sparks? An example.

5. How do you deal with differences?

6. How do you deal with conflict?

7. Are you able to share your experiences and feelings with your spouse?

8. Does your partner remind you of family members in any ways?

9. What aspect has commitment played in your relationship?

10. What role does sexuality play in your relationship?

11. Any advice for newlyweds? What is the key to your success?

12. Is religion or spirituality part of your lives?

13. What wouldn't you want to tell me about your marriage?

14. If your marrriage was a book, what would the chapters be?

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM

I, _____ consent to participate in an interview with Nancy Hurst, a graduate student in the Department of Educational Psychology, University of Alberta. I understand that the purpose of the research is to explore the process of developing a long-term enriching marriage. I understand that the information that I provide will be used solely for research purposes, a research course, and published in the form of a dissertation or journal article. I understand that identifying information will be removed from any written material. I agree to allow the information to be tape-recorded with the understanding that the tapes will be safeguarded by the researcher during the research process. I understand that the tapes will be erased and the transcribed material destroyed when the research process has been completed.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time, without penalty.

_____ _____

Signature Date

INFORMATION SHEET:

Please answer the following questions, by circling the answer which most appropriately describes you or write in the space provided. All answers will remain strictly confidential and will be used only for the purposes of this study.

1. Highest level of education attained:

Wife _____

Husband _____

2. | | Age | Age at time of marriage |
|---|---|---|
| Wife | _____ | _____ |
| Husband | _____ | _____ |

3. Number of years married_____

4. First Marriage ?

	Wife	Husband
Yes	_____	_____
If no please state how many times you've been married	_____	_____

2. Total Yearly Family Income:

A. 0000-10, 000
B. 10,000-25,000
C. 25,000-40,000
D. 50,000+

3. How many children do you have?

A. 1 child
B. 2 children
C. 3 children
D. 4 children
E. 5 or more

4. Ages of children: _____

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study.

APPENDIX C

The Participants

Couple	Education	Age at interview	Age at marriage	Length of marriage
Amanda	Psychologist	53	20	33
Tom	Ph.D (psychology)	60	27	33
Barb	Bachelor degree	53	26	27
David	Chartered Accountant	62	35	27
Cindy	Some Post Secondary	60	19	41
Bob	M.SC	65	24	41
Debra	Some Post Secondary	36	18	18
Don	Technical School	39	21	18
Elsa	High School	38	19	18
Darren	Technical School	39	21	18
Fran	Some University	35	20	15
Brian	High School	38	23	15